Art of the Ancient Near East

A Resource for Educators

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Art of the Ancient Near East

A Resource for Educators

Kim Benzel, Sarah B. Graff,
Yelena Rakic, and Edith W. Watts

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

These educational materials are made possible by
Rolin Foundation USA.

Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Written by Kim Benzel, Sarah B. Graff, Yelena Rakic, and Edith W. Watts
Lesson plans, classroom activities, and topics for discussion by Jordis Rosberg
Family guide and object questions developed by Merantine Hens and Masha Turchinsky

Senior Managing Editor: Merantine Hens
Senior Publishing and Creative Manager: Masha Turchinsky
Project Advisor: John Welch
Production Manager: Sarah Hornung

Design by Adam Squires
Family guide design by Natasha Mileshina
Maps by Anandaroop Roy

Typeset in Fedra by Peter Bi'lak
Color separations and printing by Galvanic Printing & Plate Co., Inc.,
Moonachie, New Jersey

Photographs of works in the Museum's collections are by the
Photograph Studio of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 1 Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY; fig. 2, 3, 4, 15 ©The Trustees of the British Museum; fig. 5, 7, 17, 29 Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY ; fig. 6 Gritille Project excavation photograph, 1983; fig. 10 photograph collection of Donald P. Hansen; fig. 12 Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Antikensammlung, Inv.-Nr. ANSA_IV_910; fig. 13 Scala/Art Resource, NY; Fig. 18. Borromeo/Art Resource, NY; fig. 19 ©The Trustees of The British Museum/Art Resource, NY; fig. 20 illustrations after those by Tessa Rickards in Black, Jeremy A., and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary,* Austin: University of Texas Press in co-operation with British Museum Press, 1992; fig. 24 illustration by Abdallah Kahil; fig. 25 photograph by Max Hirmer; fig. 26 illustration after that by Denise L. Hoffman and Michelle I. Marcus; fig. 28 illustration by C. Koken; fig. 30 illustration by Alfred Bollacher in Koldewey, Robert, *Das Ischtar-Tor in Babylon (The Ishtar Gate in Babylon),* Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1918; fig. 31 view of the *apadana*, 1959

Front cover: *Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Stag* (image 17)
Back cover: *Rhyton Terminating in the Forepart of a Wild Cat* (image 27)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Art of the ancient Near East : a resource for educators / Kim Benzel ... [et al.].
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-1-58839-358-6 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)—ISBN 0-300-16708-5 (Yale University Press)
1. Art, Ancient—Middle East—Study and teaching (Elementary)—United States. 2. Middle East—Antiquities—Study and teaching (Elementary)—United States. 3. Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) I. Benzel, Kim.
N5345.A885 2010
709.39'4—dc22

2010031449

Foreword

It is frequently stated, and more often than not true, that we can better understand the world we live in today by comprehending its past. Many features of our own contemporary societies originated in the lands we call the ancient Near East. This legacy is undoubtedly familiar to a large majority of elementary- and secondary-level educators, for whom no classroom study of the ancient world is complete without an exploration of the first cities, the development of farming, and the inception of writing systems—to name just a few of the important "firsts" that emerged in this dynamic area of the world. Such study proves to be particularly illuminating—and exciting for students—when paired with exploration of the rich artistic heritage of the complex cultures that coexisted and flourished in this region over the course of more than nine thousand years. We therefore take great pleasure in presenting to teachers and their students this publication, *Art of the Ancient Near East: A Resource for Educators*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art celebrates artistic creativity from across the globe and from all eras; our collection of ancient Near Eastern art provides a compelling lens through which an important segment of this history can be told.

Kim Benzel, Sarah B. Graff, and Yelena Rakic, curators in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, worked closely with Edith W. Watts, museum educator, and other Education colleagues to shape this guide as an essential and practical introduction for teachers at all grade levels and in many disciplines. We extend our thanks to this collaborative team. We also thank with special gratitude Rolin Foundation USA for so generously making this resource possible. The Foundation has been a committed sponsor of our teacher-training programs and this publication is a natural complement to that support.

We know that the educational value of this material will be realized in classrooms throughout New York as well as across the globe for many years to come. We urge teachers and their students to visit the Metropolitan Museum's collection, or that of a museum closer to home, as there is no adequate substitute for experiencing the works of art in person, and allowing the objects to tell their story—and our own.

Thomas P. Campbell
Director

Peggy Fogelman
Frederick P. and Sandra P. Rose Chairman for Education

Joan Aruz
Curator in Charge
Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art

Acknowledgments

Many colleagues participated in the development of this publication. Heartfelt thanks go to the curators and staff of the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art headed by Joan Aruz, Curator in Charge. Kim Benzel, Sarah B. Graff, and Yelena Rakic wrote the essays and object descriptions and provided invaluable guidance and curatorial expertise in this project's shaping, for which we are truly grateful. Susanna Lee gave timely and indispensable assistance. Paul Zimmerman, Michelle Marcus, Jean-François de Laperouse, and Ira Spar were consulted on various aspects of the material and each time responded with keen insight and great generosity.

We are pleased to acknowledge others who contributed significantly to the content and production of this project. Very special thanks to Edie Watts, Education's primary contributor and longtime educator, who proved a tireless consultant on behalf of classroom teachers. John Welch advised on educational content. Merantine Hens ably managed the editing process throughout. She and Masha Turchinsky collaborated on the formulation of the object discussion questions and development of other didactic elements. New York City teacher Jordis Rosberg wrote the insightful lesson plans, classroom activities, and thought-provoking topics for discussion. Erin Barnett carefully edited the manuscript in its successive stages. Thanks to Linda Seckelson and Naomi Niles of the Museum's libraries for their assistance with the selected resources. Ira Spar wrote, Salle Werner-Vaughn beautifully illustrated, and Teresa Russo produced the animated storybook provided on the CD. Sarah Hornung coordinated the myriad aspects of production. Many thanks to Paul Caro for his imaging support and expertise. Special thanks to Adam Squires for the attractive design of this resource—under Masha's creative art direction—and for his supervision of its printing. Natasha Mileshina conceived the playful design for the family guide. We extend our gratitude to Barbara Bridgers, Einar Brendalen, and Paul Lachenauer of the Museum's Photograph Studio. Peggy Fogelman and Karen Ohland offered welcome and sound guidance. As always, we appreciate the continued support of Chris Begley and the Development staff. We especially thank Sue Evans for her keen interest and valuable contributions to the many discussions regarding the development of this project.

Contents



Goals and Design of this Resource

The Metropolitan Museum's collection of ancient Near Eastern art covers both a lengthy chronological span and a vast geographical area. The more than seven thousand works of art range in date from 8000 B.C. (the Neolithic period) to the Arab conquest and rise of Islam beginning in 651 A.D., and come from ancient Mesopotamia, Iran, Syria, the Levant, Anatolia, southwestern Arabia, Central Asia, and the Indus Valley.

The goal of *Art of the Ancient Near East: A Resource for Educators* is to introduce K–12 teachers and their students to thirty particularly compelling objects in this collection within the context of the ancient Near East's contribution to our civilization. An exploration of these works with the help of this publication will enrich art, social studies, history, language arts, and science curricula, as well as offer evidence of connections with other ancient cultures, such as Egypt. Students will also be introduced to the processes of archaeology, largely by means of which we today have access to these ancient civilizations.

BACKGROUND ESSAYS

The essays provide information that is essential to an understanding of the cultures of the ancient Near East. The **Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology** and **A Brief History of the Ancient Near East**—used together with the maps and chronology—offer conceptual, geographic, and historical context and a convenient summary of ancient Near Eastern history. **Cuneiform Messages**, **Animals and Humans**, **The Royal Image**, **Communicating with the Divine**, and **Materials and Techniques** explain the major themes that emerge in an examination of the art.

OBJECT DESCRIPTIONS AND VISUAL MATERIALS

The works of art are presented in chronological order. The **Quick List of the Works of Art** is a convenient overview. Each object description provides art historical context, visual analysis, and details regarding materials and technique. A series of questions and suggested comparisons is intended to stimulate looking and to help place the objects in a broader cultural context.

The enclosed CD-ROM contains digital images of the works for classroom viewing. Teachers may show the images in a chronological survey, or according to the primary themes put forth in the essays. Before presenting these images to the class, teachers should be familiar with the objects and their descriptions. They may want to show the images without providing any background information in order to hear and respond to the students' initial reactions and questions. When the class is ready to look at the images in more depth, teachers can lead the discussion themselves or assign images to individual students who can serve as "experts" in leading the class in discussions about the function, meaning, and visual significance of each work of art. In either approach, the discussion leader(s) should ask the class to describe what they see first and then proceed with a discussion about possible function and meaning. By sharing their interpretations of the art, students will develop new language and critical thinking skills. They will begin to understand that the forms and materials the craftsperson selected to create the object were also essential in effectively expressing its function and meaning.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

This resource is designed to be flexible. Teachers can adapt it for students of all ages, interests, and abilities. Depending on the needs of the class and the time available, educators may use all or part of the lesson plans, activities, and topics for discussion.

The **National Standards for Education: Curriculum Connections** chart is a useful reference tool designed to link the **Lesson Plans**, **Classroom Activities**, and **Topics for Discussion for Older Students** to national learning standards.

Panel with Striding Lion (detail, image 23)

The **Lesson Plans**, related to the broad themes presented in the essays and including classroom activities, will help teachers create focused units of study around some of the key concepts associated with ancient Near Eastern art. Posters of the *Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II* (image 19) and *Panel with Striding Lion* (image 23) included in this resource may be used as a visual aid in the lesson plans. The **Classroom Activities** section provides extended classroom applications. The suggested **Topics for Discussion for Older Students** are intended to stimulate discussion and debate regarding relevant art historical, political, and other issues that should resonate with high school students. Through discussion, students will understand that there is room for questions, speculation, critical thinking, and their own attempts to interpret and forge meaning surrounding these issues.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The **Selected Resources** section contains bibliographies and online resources (the Museum's *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* is particularly useful). These will be helpful in gathering the additional information teachers need to make an exploration of ancient Near Eastern art stimulating and relevant to their curriculum.

A **Glossary** provides definitions for words that appear in bold face on first mention in each essay and in each object description.

Included in this resource is a poster of an illustrated **Timeline of Ancient Near Eastern Art**, which will be valuable as a reference tool in the classroom. It presents the featured works of art (in the top tier) in the context of significant events, sites, and works of art of both the ancient Near East and the rest of the world (in the two bottom tiers).

On the enclosed CD-ROM teachers will find a PDF version of this publication should they wish to easily search the material or print it for distribution to the class. Also provided is an animated storybook intended for younger students, *Marduk: King of the Gods.* We suggest that teachers view the story with their students and incorporate it in activities as part of the Gods, Goddesses, and the Supernatural lesson plan.

Finally, the supplemental family guide, *Kings, Wings...and Other Things: We're Off to the Ancient Near East!*, provides help in creative exploration of the Museum's galleries.

THE BENEFITS OF THIS RESOURCE TO STUDENTS STUDYING ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ART

- Students will acquire the basic vocabulary, concepts, and criteria for understanding, interpreting, and analyzing ancient Near Eastern art.
- Students will be encouraged to use higher-level thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Teachers and students will be empowered to propose analytical questions or hypotheses, formulate conclusions or generalizations, or raise questions and issues for further investigation.
- Students will understand and appreciate the role of values, beliefs, and ideas in shaping ancient Near Eastern culture. They will learn that ancient Near Eastern works of art, not written communication alone, were created as a primary means of expressing these values, beliefs, and ideas.
- Students will explore the subject matter and themes in ancient Near Eastern art through a variety of processes, techniques, and materials to gain a better understanding of how and why this art was created.
- Students will understand that the variety of styles in ancient Near Eastern art reflects the many different cultures that existed in western Asia from the fourth millennium B.C. to the middle of the first millennium A.D.
- Students will encounter significant works of ancient Near Eastern art and will begin to assemble a repertoire of visual references. They will recognize that works of art are an important primary source for learning about and understanding civilizations, both ancient and modern.


The Ancient Near East
20°E
30°E
40°E
50°E
60°E
70°E
40°N
30°N
20°N
Black Sea
Mediterranean Sea
Aegean Sea
Caspian Sea
Aral Sea
Red Sea
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
Strait of Hormuz
Lake Van
Lake Urmia
Dead Sea
Tigris
Euphrates
Khabur
Diyala
Nile
Indus
Helmand
Amu Darya (Oxus)
Syr Darya (Jaxartes)
Caucasus Mountains
Taurus Mountains
Zagros Mountains
Elburz Mountains
Kopet Dag Mountains
Hindu Kush
Pamir Mountains
Dasht-e Kavir
Dasht-e Lut
Cyclades
Thera
Crete
RUSSIA
KAZAKHSTAN
KYRGYZSTAN
UZBEKISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
TURKMENISTAN
GEORGIA
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
ALBANIA
GREECE
TURKEY
CYPRUS
SYRIA
LEBANON
IRAQ
IRAN
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
WEST BANK
GAZA STRIP
ISRAEL
JORDAN
KUWAIT
SAUDI ARABIA
BAHRAIN
QATAR
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
OMAN
YEMEN
EGYPT
LIBYA
SUDAN
ERITREA
ETHIOPIA
PHRYGIA
ANATOLIA
URARTU
ASSYRIA
MESOPOTAMIA
BABYLONIA
LEVANT
CANAAN
SINAI
ELAM
PERSIA
MARGIANA
BACTRIA
BADAKHSHAN
ARABIA
NUBIA
MA'IN
SABA'
HADRAMAWT
QATABAN
HIMYAR
Tirana
Sofia
Istanbul
Troy
Mycenae
Athens
Gordion
Ankara
Alaca Höyük
Boğazköy
Kültepe
Acemhöyük
Uluburun
Maikop
T'bilisi
Yerevan
Baku
Nicosia
Ugarit
Ebla
Aleppo
Arslan Tash
Tell Mozan
Tell Brak
Hasanlu
Khorsabad
Mosul
Nineveh
Nimrud
Hatra
Ashur
Dura Europos
Mari
Palmyra
Byblos
Beirut
Damascus
Amman
Jerusalem
Beersheba
Nahal Mishmar
Petra
Alexandria
Giza
Cairo
Tell el-Amarna
Khartoum
Asmara
Behistun
Tepe Nush-i Jan
Tepe Giyan
Tepe Sialk
Tehran
Tepe Hissar
Tureng-Tepe
Ashgabat
Nisa
Gonur-Depe
Tashkent
Bishkek
Dushanbe
Kabul
Islamabad
Harappa
Baghdad
Susa
Girsu
Uruk
Ur
Eridu
Anshan
Pasargadae
Persepolis
Shiraz
Qasr-i Abu Nasr
Tepe Yahya
Kuwait City
Manama
Doha
Abu Dhabi
Muscat
Riyadh
Medina
Mecca
Sana'a'
See detail
Detail of Babylonia
Tell Asmar
Baghdad
Khafajah
Seleucia
Ctesiphon
AKKAD
BABYLONIA
SUMER
Babylon
Kish
Dilbat
Nippur
Modern Capital
Modern City
Ancient Site
0
500 mi
0
1000 km


Resources in the Ancient Near East
20°E
30°E
40°E
50°E
60°E
70°E
40°N
30°N
20°N
Black Sea
Caucasus Mountains
Aral Sea
Syr Darya (Jaxartes)
Amu Darya (Oxus)
Gold
GREECE
Aegean Sea
PHRYGIA
Silver
Copper
ANATOLIA
Gold
Copper
Copper
Lake Van
URARTU
Tigris
Ivory (Elephant)
Taurus Mountains
Silver
Tin
Cedar
ASSYRIA
Lake Urmia
Copper
Caspian Sea
Kopet Dag Mountains
MARGIANA
BACTRIA
Pamir Mountains
Lapis Lazuli
Silver
Tin
BADAKHSHAN
Hindu Kush
CYPRUS
Copper
Cedar
Euphrates
Khabur
Glass
Ivory (Elephant)
Cedar
Mediterranean Sea
SYRIA
MESOPOTAMIA
Diyala
Elburz Mountains
Dasht-e Kavir
Tin
Tin
LEVANT
Ivory (Hippopotamus)
Glass
CANAAN
BABYLONIA
PERSIA
Dead Sea
Copper
SINAI
ELAM
Zagros Mountains
Dasht-e Lut
Helmand
Ivory (Elephant)
Glass
Ivory (Hippopotamus)
EGYPT
Indus
Diorite
Nile
Persian Gulf
INDUS VALLEY
Ivory (Elephant)
Strait of Hormuz
Carnelian
Agate
ARABIA
Red Sea
Diorite
Arabian Sea
NUBIA
Ivory (Elephant)
Gold
Ebony
MA'IN
Frankincense and Myrrh
SABA'
HADRAMAWT
QATABAN
HIMYAR
0
500 mi
0
1000 km



Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology

The origin of many features of civilization—such as writing, urbanism, science, and metalworking, to name only a few—lies in the lands of the ancient Near East where communities evolved from small villages of hunters, gatherers, and farmers into the first true cities. "Ancient Near East" is a general term that embraces both an enormous geographical territory and a long chronological span. Many different peoples lived in this area of more than three million square miles that included a variety of ecological environments—alluvial plains of river valleys, coastal regions, high mountain steppes, deserts, and oases. The combination of so many different living conditions and ethnic groups produced the rich and complex cultures that today we call the ancient Near East.

The art of the ancient Near East displays a similarly great variety of forms and styles, reflecting the many peoples, cities, kingdoms, and empires that flourished in the region for thousands of years. Yet, in the midst of this diversity, there was also consistency and continuity. One of the constant and primary aims of ancient Near Eastern art was to capture the relationship between the terrestrial and divine realms. The production of art appears to have been primarily motivated by spiritual, religious, or political concerns and thus was directly commissioned by temples, palaces, or other elite institutions. Much of it was intended to communicate specific religious or political messages to audiences who were more accustomed to reading images (visual literacy) than to reading words (textual literacy), even when the objects were inscribed.

Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II (detail, image 19)

At no time during these millennia does there seem to have been a concept of "art for art's sake" such as exists in our present culture. Ancient Near Eastern descriptions of exceptional works of art tended to focus on how expertly crafted these objects were, not on how inventive or creative in concept. Texts indicate that artists were considered skilled craftspeople and technicians whose expertise was highly valued and often passed down from generation to generation within families. These artisans were respected primarily for their skill, as were other craftspeople who worked with their hands, such as the makers of pots or furniture (**FIG. 1**). While rarely do we know the name of an artist or witness an example of an individual's own imagination, we know from texts that their work was often done by way of certain rituals. These rituals included such ceremonies as the eye and mouth opening of a statue, for example, in which the craftsperson carved the final details of the eyes and mouth according to certain procedures and in doing so actually brought the statue to life. While it is possible that priests were also present at these ceremonies, it appears that craftspeople were considered ritual specialists in their own right.

As a result, images and objects were thought to be imbued with the actual essence and power of those they represented and therefore able to function effectively on behalf of that deity, person, creature, or thing. The ability of an image or object to carry out this function depended on the craftsperson following particular procedures and

Images 5, 15, 18, 20, 23



FIGURE 1

Plaque of carpenter carving a chair leg. Mesopotamia, Old Babylonian period, ca. 2000–1600 B.C. Terracotta; 3¼ in. (8.4 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris



FIGURE 2

Figurine of a woman. Chagar Bazar, Syria, Halaf period, ca. 5000 B.C. Terracotta, paint; 3 in. (8 cm). The Trustees of the British Museum, London

techniques, including the use of specific materials, to manufacture it. Skill and craft were paramount to the process of "bringing to life" images and objects. This emphasis on skill and technique, rather than on a purely creative pursuit, is crucial to the understanding of ancient Near Eastern art.

The art of the ancient Near East took many forms. As early as Neolithic times in the eighth and seventh millennia B.C., the first examples of three-dimensional sculpture appeared, primarily in the form of human and animal figurines in clay (**FIG. 2**). It was not until sometime in the fourth millennium B.C. that statues clearly represented royal or divine figures. However, relief sculpture—sculpture that projects from a two-dimensional background—was the predominant form of artistic expression in the ancient Near East for much of its history. This type of work could be done in stone, wood, ivory, metal, clay, and precious or semi-precious stones. It was used in architecture and on commemorative monuments, plaques, vessels, furniture attachments, and on jewelry and stamp or cylinder seals. Seals represent a special kind of relief in which the surface of a small cylinder or stamp was engraved, and the image appeared in relief when the seal was pressed into wet clay.

Images 19, 22, 23, 26, 28, 30

Image 8

Images 4, 13

Images 1, 17, 25, 27, 30

Vessels of varying shapes, sizes, and materials were also common throughout the ancient Near East from the earliest times. Some were used for practical purposes such as cooking, serving, or storage. Others, often elaborately decorated and made of precious materials, were distinctly ritual or ceremonial in function. Containers were placed in tombs as if to accompany the dead, and sometimes the remains of the dead were even buried in large jars. The archaeological context in which a vessel is found usually helps to determine its function in antiquity.

Images 4, 10, 19, 29, 30

Images 7, 12, 14, 16, 18, 27, 30

From as early as the fourth millennium B.C., concepts such as the many roles of the ruler and aesthetic choices such as the use of contrasting colored material are already in evidence in the arts of the ancient Near East. These remained constant throughout the following millennia, even as artistic styles varied greatly during that time span among different regions. In contrast to a more self-contained area such as Egypt, where a unified and consistent style can be identified, artistic influences were circulated among the regions of Mesopotamia, Syria, Anatolia, and the Levant as well as southwestern Iran and as far as southern Arabia. In the east, the distant Indus Valley region (the area that includes parts of modern Pakistan and India) also interacted with these core regions, as did the intervening regions of eastern Iran and ancient Bactria and Margiana (western Central Asia). The arts of this great expanse reflect a vast and diversified tapestry of peoples and languages organized in independent polities but culturally unified through trade. As a result of these complex interconnections, there was great variation in the artistic production of the ancient Near Eastern world, and different styles flourished alongside each other.

Thus, the arts of the ancient Near East reflect not only the extraordinary developments in the cities of the Mesopotamian heartland but also their interaction with contemporary civilizations to the east and west. These were seminal millennia in the history of humanity. By exploring them we gain perspective not only on the major artistic and cultural achievements of the ancient Near East, but also on the enduring legacy of the earliest of urban civilizations.

This legacy is apparent in a number of fields, not only in the arts. The invention of the potter's wheel and writing as well as the development of agriculture are only three of the countless innovations made by people in the ancient Near East. Others include metalworking, glassmaking, and the use of horses for transportation and warfare. Furthermore, the accumulated learning of the ancient scholars of Babylonia provided the foundations of later achievements in astronomy, mathematics, physiology, and medicine, among other disciplines. These revolutionary ideas changed the world in such far-reaching ways that it is hard to imagine the manner in which civilization would have developed without them.

Even during ancient times, the inhabitants of the Near East acknowledged the accomplishments of their own predecessors, and





often made use of monuments and motifs created in earlier times for new purposes. For example, the Achaemenid Persian kings (ca. 539–331 B.C.) borrowed the format and style of monumental Assyrian reliefs (ca. 911–612 B.C.) for their palace decorations and carvings on cliff faces, just as their own royal imagery was appropriated starting in the third century A.D. by the Sasanian kings who in turn claimed them as ancestors. Likewise, a second-century B.C. prince who ruled an area in southern Mesopotamia that had been governed by Gudea of Lagash in the late third millennium B.C. discovered the earlier ruler's statues in the rubble of ancient buildings. The prince set them up in his own palace, apparently in a respectful homage, perhaps intending to legitimize his rule by placing himself in the line of succession from Gudea. Ancient objects continued to be reused during more recent times, reflecting an intense popular fascination with finds from excavations of recently discovered cities otherwise only known from the Bible. For instance, the first excavator of Nimrud in the nineteenth century A.D., A. H. Layard, created a set of jewelry from cylinder and stamp seals he had collected as a gift for his bride, which she can be seen wearing with evident pride in her portrait (**FIGS. 3, 4**).

Image 26

Image 10

Beyond these concrete examples of the appropriation of the Near Eastern past, ancient motifs and ideas passed into other cultures in a more indirect form. Composite creatures such as the griffin were incorporated into the medieval bestiary through the transfer of imagery in sources ever more distant from the original. Even now, traces of the ancient Near East survive in modern-day culture. Famous works of ancient art appear on the monetary issues of many Middle Eastern countries as national icons; law students read Hammurabi's legal

FIGURE 3

Lady Layard's jewelry in the Assyrian style. Carved cylinder and stamp seals dating to various ancient periods; gold settings created in 1869; length of necklace 19⅝ in. (49.7 cm). The Trustees of the British Museum, London

FIGURE 4

Vincente Palmaroli y Gonzalez (Spanish, 1834–1896), *Portrait of Lady Layard wearing her jewelry in the Assyrian style*, 1870. Oil on canvas; 40 × 31 in. (101.5 × 78.5 cm). The Trustees of the British Museum, London

decisions to put their training in perspective; and the lions that guard the entrance to the New York Public Library likely descend from the ancient Near Eastern tradition of sculpted lions guarding important architectural spaces (**FIG. 5**). It is true that we can no longer access the past as directly as the ancients could, as we no longer speak the languages or adhere to the cultural and religious practices of the ancient Near East. Still, with every piece of information gleaned from ongoing archaeological explorations and from the translation of **cuneiform** texts, we achieve a greater understanding of why the visual language and technological achievements of the ancient Near East continue to resonate for us today.

Image 23



FIGURE 5

Head of a lion. Mesopotamia, Old Babylonian period, ca. 2000–1600 B.C. Terracotta; 24 in. (61 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris

Uncovering the Ancient Near East Through Archaeology

Everything we know about the many and varied ancient Near Eastern peoples—their art, architecture, religious beliefs, literature, and skills in technology, trade, and accounting—is largely due to the work of archaeologists. Study of the ancient Near East in the modern era began in the nineteenth century with an interest in deciphering the ancient languages written in cuneiform, the script that developed from the earliest pictographic writing in southern Mesopotamia. A trilingual inscription carved on a rock face at Behistun in the Zagros Mountains of Iran allowed Western explorers to decipher the Akkadian language by the late 1850s (see "Cuneiform Messages," p. 27–29). At this time, the first modern archaeological investigations of the region were focused on uncovering ancient Assyrian and Babylonian cities, temples, and palaces. Early British and French excavations revealed the royal Assyrian cities of Nimrud, Nineveh, and Khorsabad, with their splendidly decorated palaces and rich treasuries. With the advent of systematic excavation techniques by the late nineteenth century, archaeology became the primary means of studying the ancient past in this pivotal region.

Images 4, 13

Images 19–21

The cities of the ancient Near East were built primarily of mud bricks. Each generation repaired or rebuilt their settlements on top of the rubble of earlier buildings, creating layers of debris. After cities were abandoned, rain, wind, and occasional flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers gradually wore them down until they resembled low hills or mounds (**FIG. 6**). It was only when archaeologists began to seek the ruins of ancient civilizations mentioned in the Bible that they realized what these mounds were.



FIGURE 6

View of the mound of Tell Gritille, southeastern Turkey, 1983. The site was probably first occupied in the early Neolithic period (7th–6th millennium B.C.) and abandoned sometime after the late Byzantine-Seljuq period (11th–13th centuries A.D.). Thousands of *tells*, or man-made mounds, dot the landscape of the modern Middle East.

As archaeologists dig down into ancient mounds (which are called *tells, tels, tals*, *höyüks*, *chogas*, or *tepes* in modern Near Eastern languages) they are able to date what they find by keeping precise records of the stratigraphy—that is, the arrangement of the debris layers or levels they dig through (FIG. 10). One layer is called a stratum, and several layers are strata. Objects and architecture found in the stratum just below the surface are usually from the most recent period in time; the ones in the next stratum are older, and so on down to the oldest objects in the lowest, or deepest, stratum. This forms a basic time sequence for the objects being excavated.

Archaeologists keep detailed records of everything found in each stratum. They also group the objects according to type; for instance, objects such as axes, drinking cups, and fragments of sculpture are put into separate groups. Then they track the way each type of object changes in style and shape, level by level. This gives them a rough framework for dating the objects at that site, as well as for dating objects of the same style found at other sites nearby. Sometimes, objects similar in style turn up at a distant site, which provides evidence that the people at both locations must have lived at about the same time and knew and traded with each other.

Image 1

Pottery, even if it is broken, is more valuable for dating by shape and style than any other kind of object because it was used by almost every culture and at every level in society within each culture. Archaeologists usually find more examples of pottery than of any other type of object at sites where pottery making was known.

Due to the acidic soil and damp climate of much of the modern Middle East, many types of materials, such as wood and textiles, have not been preserved as they have been in the desert conditions of Egypt. Furthermore, the mud brick widely used in construction in the ancient Near East deteriorates more quickly over time than stone. As a result, the scarcity of archaeological remains as compared with Egypt presents a misleading impression. The comparatively few objects that survive from the ancient Near East can only hint at the richness of the cultures that created them. However, the dynamic nature of archaeology means that new discoveries are happening all the time, and thus the information available to us about the ancient past continues to evolve and change constantly.

Images 3, 6, 17, 24, 25, 27

Finally, there are the intangible elements of an ancient culture—for example, motion, sound, smell, thought, and emotion. While these aspects of daily or ritual life—such as the smell of incense, the motion of pouring, or the sound an object makes when shaken—cannot always be retrieved and understood today, at times one or more of these elements is suggested by the way an object was made or was meant to be used. Occasionally written texts even help to reinforce or confirm modern ideas about the "invisible" aspects of the past.

A Brief History of the Ancient Near East

What we call the ancient Near East encompasses a geographical area from Turkey to the Indus Valley of present-day Pakistan and from the Caucasus to the Arabian peninsula, during the period between the first village settlements in the Neolithic period of the eighth millennium B.C. and the defeat of the Sasanian empire by the armies of the Islamic prophet Muhammad in the middle of the seventh century A.D. Unlike ancient Egypt, this region possessed a richly varied topography and a diverse mix of ethnicities, with a resulting history that is complex and not always easily summarized. This brief introduction will touch on the high points in the history of the regions represented by objects in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum: Mesopotamia, Iran, Anatolia, the Levant, and southwestern Arabia.

MESOPOTAMIA

The core of the ancient Near East is Mesopotamia, the fertile pasture- and farm-land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Lacking in luxury materials such as metal, precious stones, and large timbers, the urban civilizations that developed here starting in the fourth millennium B.C. sought these resources from outside; the trade networks that developed as a result placed southern Mesopotamia at the nexus of routes connecting the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Iran, the Indus Valley, and Central Asia for the next five thousand years.

The world's first cities and first written documents both derive from southern Mesopotamia and southwestern Iran during the late fourth and early third millennia B.C., when urban settlements like Uruk and Ur in Mesopotamia and Susa in Iran flourished, and specialized full-time occupations such as architect, scribe, craftsperson, and farmer developed—along with the institutions of priesthood and kingship. The inhabitants of southern Mesopotamia during the third millennium B.C. are called Sumerians. Many of the institutions and traditions they established, including literary forms and religious tenets, endured until the fall of Babylon to the Achaemenid Persians in the mid-first millennium B.C. Although we do not know for certain the nature of social organization before this time, we do know that by the early third millennium B.C. the region was organized into city-states, each controlled by a ruler called a *lugal*, or big man, who was both secular and religious leader. This essential concept of leadership would remain fundamental for millennia. Much of the art of this time, called the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2900–2350 B.C.), depicted sacred or ritual scenes; secular representations only became common late in this period.

Image 4

Images 5, 6

The following period saw a dramatic change in the structure of society, the arts, and the language of the region, when the Akkadian dynasty rose to power (ca. 2350–2150 B.C.). Under the rule of Sargon of Akkad and his descendants, the dynasty expanded its control within Mesopotamia and far-flung regions through trade and warfare; overseas trade is specifically mentioned with regions that may correspond to modern-day Bahrain, Oman, and the Indus Valley. Diorite, a hard, dark stone, was a prized material for royal sculpture that was likely imported from the Persian Gulf, while, as in earlier periods, lapis lazuli was brought from Afghanistan and carnelian and agate were obtained from the Indus; the desire for these luxurious goods was an important part of the impetus toward territorial and trading expansion under the Akkadian kings. The legacy of Akkadian rule far outlived the dynasty itself: Sargon and his grandson Naram-Sin became the subjects of later Mesopotamian literary epics, and a new style introduced in Akkadian art imbued objects as diverse as cylinder seals and monumental relief Image 8 carvings with a keen interest in natural forms and dynamic movement.

Following the collapse of the Akkadian empire around 2150 B.C., city-states gradually took root again in southern Mesopotamia. Under the rule of the Third Dynasty of Ur (ca. 2100–2000 B.C.), many building projects and monuments enriched southern Mesopotamia. The art Image 10 of the period displays a new focus on piety and humility, in response to the overly self-aggrandizing displays of the Akkadian rulers, whose hubris was thought to have led to the fall of their dynasty.

At this time, the Amorites, a nomadic people from the deserts of Syria and Arabia, began to play an increasingly dominant role in the Near East. By the early second millennium B.C., much of Mesopotamia was under the rule of Amorite kings such as Hammurabi (ca. 1792–1750 B.C.), famous for his so-called law code (**FIG. 7**).

Meanwhile, Assyrian traders from the city of Ashur on the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia developed a trading partnership with eastern Anatolia, in which tin and textiles brought from Assyria were Image 13 exchanged for Anatolian gold, silver, and copper. During the mid-second millennium B.C., Assyria and the Mitanni state vied for power—the latter a formidable but still little-understood empire that controlled a vast area in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Further to the south, rulers who called themselves Kassites and may have originally come from the Zagros Mountains consolidated power in Babylonia after the fall of the Amorite dynasty in Babylon around 1595 B.C. at the hands of the Hittites. Although few monumental works survive from the Kassite period, cylinder seals attest to the fine craftsmanship that must have characterized the arts of this major territorial state and its neighbors.

Around 1200 B.C., famine and widespread governmental instability combined with marauding armies and still-unknown factors to bring down the ruling powers in the region. This collapse was followed by a period of great empires, first in Assyria and later in Babylonia

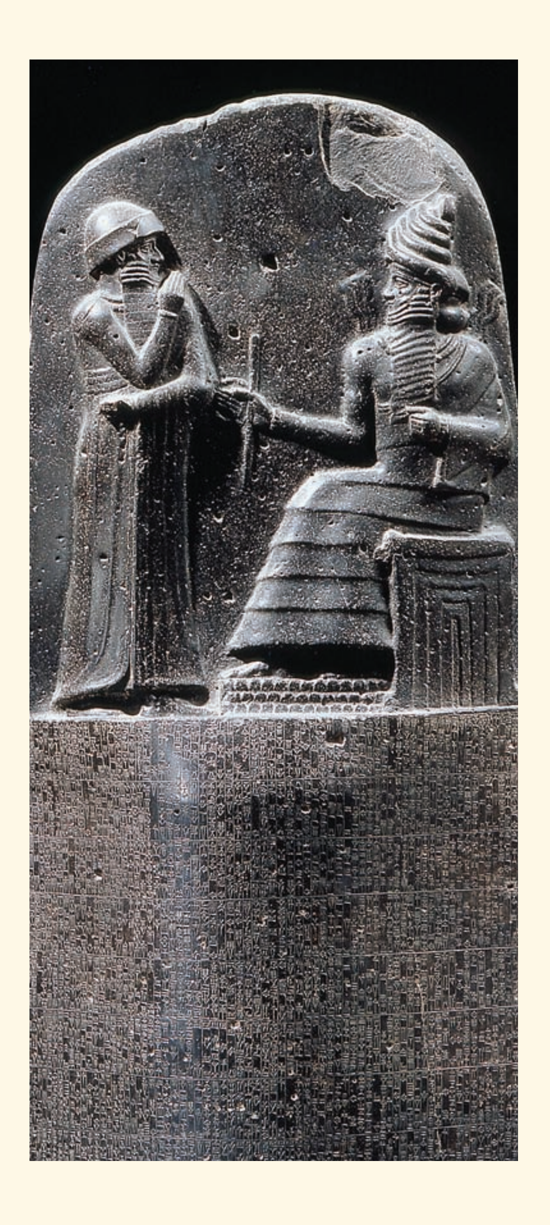




FIGURE 7

Stele of Hammurabi. This stele records the so-called Code of Hammurabi. The scene at top (see detail, far left) shows the enthroned sun god Shamash, god of justice, presenting the insignia of rulership to Hammurabi, an Amorite ruler of Babylon. The inscription below records legal decisions the king made during his reign, and is in fact not a law code per se but rather a demonstration of his just leadership. Mesopotamia, Sippar; found at Susa, Iran. Old Babylonian period, reign of Hammurabi, ca. 1792–1750 B.C. Diorite; 88⅝ in. (225 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris

and Achaemenid Iran. From the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C., Assyria prospered under a series of exceptionally effective rulers who expanded its borders far beyond the northern plains. Beginning in the ninth century B.C., the Assyrian armies controlled the major trade routes and dominated the surrounding states in Babylonia, western Iran, Anatolia, and the Levant. During the three centuries of Assyrian empire, palace art reflected an increasing concern with an elaboration and glorification of the royal image—an **iconography** of power that influenced the art of neighboring peoples to the east and west who imitated Assyrian works of art in their own monuments.

Image 19

Long-standing conflict with Babylonia finally brought down Assyria at the end of the seventh century B.C. Although the Babylonian empire that followed proved short-lived, the capital city of Babylon was the focus of magnificent building projects on a grand

scale—such as the Ishtar Gate and its adjoining Processional Way, decorated with brilliantly colored bulls, lions, and dragons of glazed brick. By the middle of the sixth century B.C., rebellion within the empire left Babylonia and all of Mesopotamia open to attack and conquest by the Medes and Persians, who, during this period, had been gathering strength in Iran to the east.

Image 23

IRAN

Iran, ancient Persia, is a large country divided topographically into a number of distinct regions. The area of the modern-day province of Khuzistan in the southwest, called Elam in modern scholarship, was Mesopotamia's closest neighbor, both geographically and politically. Its major center, Susa, developed along with the cities of southern Mesopotamia in the late fourth and early third millennia B.C. The other important Elamite city, Anshan (modern Tal-i-Malyan), was located in the highlands but maintained a strong connection with the lowland areas; later Elamite texts record the ruler's title as "King of Anshan and Susa."

Under kings ruling from Susa in the later second millennium B.C., Elam became a major political force, taking advantage of periods of political and military weakness in southern Mesopotamia to invade and plunder its cities and to briefly control the region. The first millennium B.C. saw the rise of the Achaemenid Persians, who ruled a vast area from Turkmenistan to the Mediterranean coast and Egypt—the largest empire in history up to that point, and one especially remarkable for its policy of religious tolerance toward conquered peoples. Given the huge geographical span of the empire and the diverse peoples it incorporated, it is not surprising to find influences from the arts of Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Greece, and others in the style and iconography of Achaemenid court art. The limits of Persian imperial expansion were underscored by the loss of two wars on the Greek mainland during the early fifth century B.C. Still, the Achaemenids seem to have remained a strong and vital administration up until the invasion of Alexander the Great, whose Macedonian armies burned the great ceremonial center of Persepolis to the ground in 330 B.C. and annexed the empire.

Images 25, 26

Although conquering and ruling much of Iran and the rest of the ancient Near East, Alexander chose to set up his capital at Babylon in Mesopotamia and embarked on several ambitious rebuilding projects in the city, including the reconstruction of the famed ziggurat and temple of Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon. After Alexander's early death in 323 B.C., his empire was divided among his generals, with Seleucus receiving the Near East, including Iran and parts of Central Asia. The Seleucid empire retained much of the administrative structure set up by the Achaemenids and adopted local practices and cults to gain the support of subject populations, while also introducing Greek language and architecture. This hybrid culture continued

under the Parthians, an Iranian dynasty who defeated the Seleucids in the late third century B.C., and their successors the Sasanians, who justified their conquest of the Parthian empire by casting themselves as the heirs of the Achaemenid legacy. During the period of Sasanian rule from 224–637 A.D., kingly ideals were expressed in finely crafted metal vessels (**FIG. 8**). The Iranian national epic, the *Shahnameh*, also began to be compiled during this period. The Sasanians' ongoing conflict with the Byzantine empire (also known as the Eastern Roman empire) over control of the trade routes and cities of Anatolia and Syria ended finally with the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia, Iran, and almost half of Byzantium. It is a convention of modern scholarship to start a new chapter of the region's history here, but it is crucial to recognize that much continuity remained with the ancient cultural traditions of the Near East.

Image 27

Image 30

ANATOLIA

Anatolia, modern-day Turkey, was important throughout antiquity for its abundant natural resources, especially metal ores—gold, silver, and copper—that were mined in the mountains surrounding the central plateau. Archaeological evidence suggests that the early stages



FIGURE 8

Plate with a king hunting rams. Iran, Sasanian period, late 5th–early 6th century A.D. Silver, mercury gilding, niello inlay; diam. 8⅝ in. (21.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1934 (34.33)

of metallurgy, the hammering and melting of native copper, may first have occurred during the late Neolithic period (eighth–seventh millennia B.C.) in eastern Anatolia, where there were enormous deposits of copper in the Taurus Mountains. The lively trade in metals between the people of the Anatolian plateau and Assyria (northern Mesopotamia), documented by thousands of **cuneiform** texts from the merchants' settlement at Kültepe in central Anatolia, brought prosperity to the region.

Image 13

It was under the Hittites, a people who ruled the region starting in the seventeenth century B.C., that Anatolia became a major power in the ancient Near East. The fragmented kingdoms that made up the region were unified by the military campaigns of a ruler named Hattusili. Succeeding kings' military ventures, including the sack of Babylon in 1595 B.C., fundamentally destabilized the region by removing the strongest rulers of Syria and Mesopotamia. The Hittites themselves were unable to hold on to power in the chaotic years that followed, only regaining control of Anatolia around 1400 B.C. through the skilled military leadership of a series of strong kings. Until the widespread regional collapse around 1200 B.C., the Hittite empire remained a formidable state with control over much of Anatolia and territories in northern Syria.

In the early first millennium B.C., a number of smaller kingdoms replaced the Hittites as the major political powers in Anatolia—notably Urartu, a rival of Assyria localized around a capital at Lake Van in modern-day Armenia, and Phrygia, which occupied central and western Anatolia with its center in Gordion. In the political turmoil of the seventh century B.C., the Phrygians were swept from power by nomadic tribes from the steppes north of the Caucasus, while Scythian tribes moved into Iran and Mesopotamia from eastern Anatolia, joining the Median and Babylonian armies to attack Assyria in 614–612 B.C. By the following century, under pressure from the expanding power of Achaemenid Iran, the Scythians and many other nomadic groups had moved west across the steppe into northern Greece and eastern Europe.

SYRIA AND THE LEVANT

Ancient Near Eastern scholarship adopted the fifteenth-century name "Levant"—a term referring to the direction of the sunrise as seen from the West—for the area that today encompasses southern and coastal Syria, Israel, Jordan, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Lebanon. Although this name ignores the indigenous identity of the peoples who have inhabited this region—including Canaanites, Israelites, and Phoenicians, among many others—the complex demographic makeup of the area over its long history creates difficulties in nomenclature that are not easily resolved. For these reasons, the Levant is still used as a term of compromise. Ancient inland Syria, however, is commonly referred to by the country's modern name.

The central location of Syria and the Levant made it a crossroads



FIGURE 9

Relief of a seated figure holding a lotus flower. Before the seated figure are two bull-men holding up a winged sun disk, a divine symbol. Bull-men appear in the art of the ancient Near East as early as the beginning of the third millennium B.C. Syria, excavated at Tell Halaf, south wall of Temple Palace, Neo-Hittite/Aramaean period, 850–830 B.C. Limestone; 26 ¾ × 42 ⅛ × 20 1/16 in. (68 × 107 × 51 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1943 (43.135.1)

of the ancient world, and evidence of trade with Mesopotamia dates back to the late fourth millennium B.C. By the third millennium B.C., certain Syrian cities such as Ebla and Mari flourished as preeminent urban centers that already controlled many of the emerging trade networks that reached their zenith in the following millennium. In the early second millennium B.C., Ebla, Mari, and other Levantine cities, such as the Mediterranean ports of Ugarit in Syria and Byblos in Lebanon, developed special prominence as centers through which goods flowed between east and west. It was during this time that a Canaanite population was firmly attested in the Levant and rose to become a powerful force in this interregional trade. The Hyksos dynasty, which ruled Egypt between 1640 and 1540 B.C., were of Levantine, possibly Canaanite, origin.

The latter half of the second millennium B.C. is illuminated by royal correspondence discovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt, dating to the fourteenth century B.C. The **Amarna Letters** reflect the struggles for power and domination, and for trade and tribute, which characterized the expanding international relations that came to dominate the ancient Near East, including Syria and the Levant. After the widespread collapse of about 1200 B.C., the region fragmented into a number of small states led by rulers who spoke a language called Aramaean. Excavations at Aramaean sites in northern Syria and southeastern Turkey have uncovered major architectural monuments decorated with stone slabs carved in low relief with scenes of political and religious significance (FIG. 9). Later, starting in the ninth century B.C., Assyria solidified its control over Syria and the Levant. Ivories found at the Assyrian capital of Nimrud in northern Mesopotamia may have

been made by craftspeople from Syria or Phoenicia working at the court, or collected as booty or tribute following the Assyrian conquest of towns in western Syria during the early first millennium B.C.

Image 21 Assyrian rule in Syria was followed by Babylonian and finally Achaemenid Persian conquests. The invasion by Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. placed much of Syria under Greek control. From the first century B.C. to the third century A.D., the independent caravan city of Palmyra flourished because of its position along the trade routes crossing the Syrian desert, leading to a uniquely hybrid Palmyrene culture. Meanwhile, Roman armies clashed with Parthian Image 28 forces, as did Byzantines with Sasanians in later times, along a frontier delineated by the central and northern Euphrates.

SOUTHWESTERN ARABIA

The legendary wealth of southwestern Arabia (modern Yemen) came from the trade in frankincense and myrrh, gum resins native to the region that were highly valued in the ancient world. In the first millennium B.C., the four dominant kingdoms of Maʿin, Sabaʾ, Qataban, and Hadramawt shared similar languages, a pantheon of gods, a distinctive alphabet, and a common artistic tradition. They also vied for control of the aromatics trade and built a thriving urban culture focused on the careful management of scarce water resources. Spices, gold, ivory, pearls, precious stones, and textiles from Africa, India, and the Far East passed through the local ports of southwestern Arabia, which was part of a vast trade network. The kingdom's immense wealth is reflected in the large- and small-scale cast bronze sculptures produced throughout most of the first millennium B.C.

Image 24 In the third century A.D., the Himyarite kingdom, centered in the mountainous highlands south of modern-day Yemen's capital of Sanaʿa, defeated and absorbed the other South Arabian kingdoms. By the sixth century A.D., however, it too would be overrun by more powerful neighbors so that its political and cultural influence would be negligible by the time of the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D.

Dating Near Eastern History

Two principal approaches to assessing the passage of time are used in the study of the ancient world: *absolute* chronology and *relative* chronology. The term absolute, used in this resource, means that events are assigned to specific calendar years. However, using such dates to indicate when events took place gives a false impression of certainty. Relative chronology aims to establish the order of events as they occurred. This is based on the linkage of stratigraphic contexts uncovered through archaeology to changes in artifact styles, rather than to calendar dates (see "Uncovering the Ancient Near East," p. 15–16) (**FIG. 10**). Both these approaches provide an important foundation essential to the study of history.

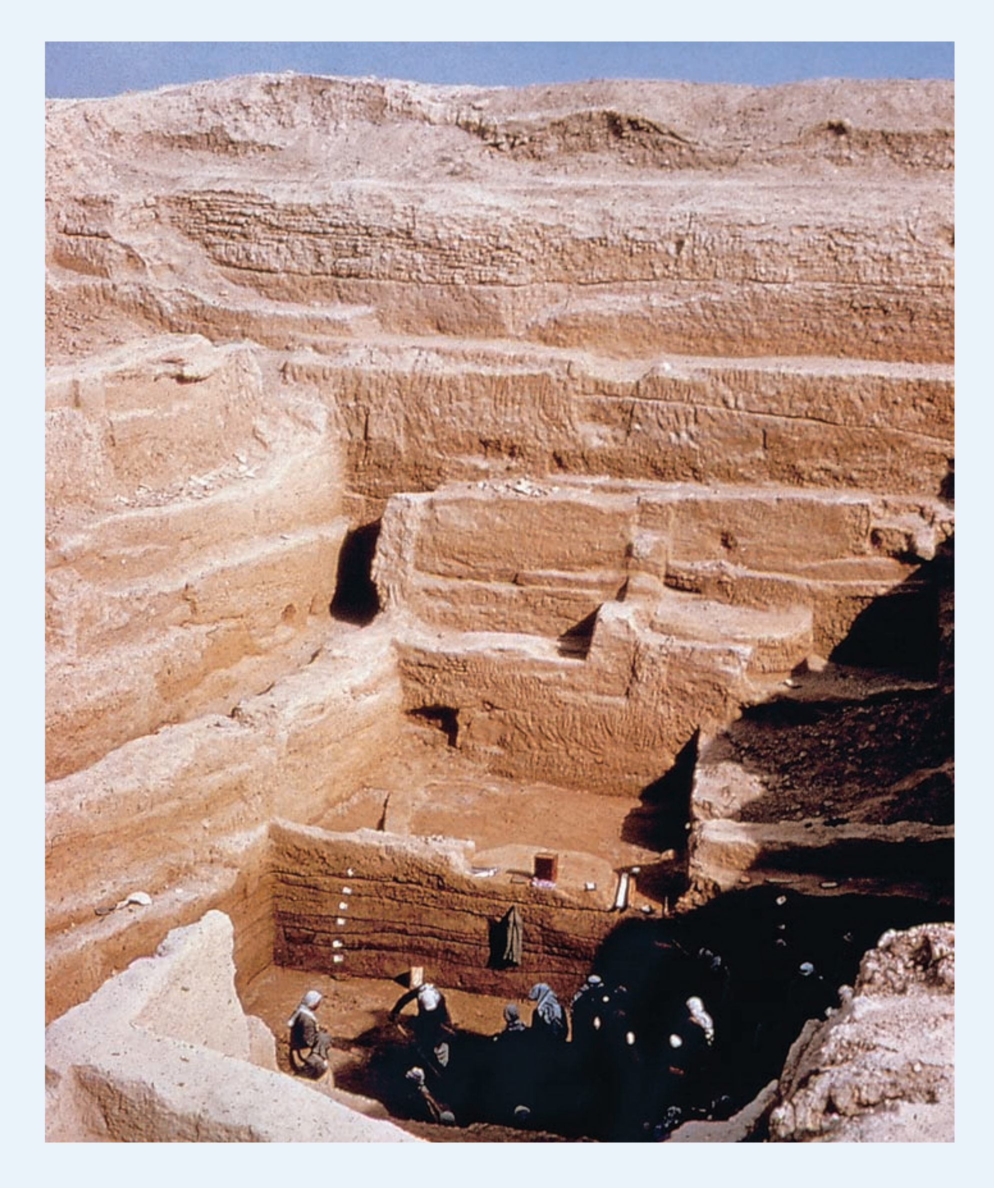


FIGURE 10

Excavations at Nippur, an ancient Sumerian city in southern Mesopotamia (modern Nuffar, Iraq), 1960–61. In this view, a temple dedicated to the goddess Inanna is being excavated. The levels being uncovered here date to the Early Protoliterate/Uruk period (3300–2900 B.C.). Note the white labels marking the series of levels immediately above the work area. Photograph collection of Donald P. Hansen

Dating systems can also be specific to geographic areas. For example, archaeologists in the Levant and Anatolia use a system that divides historical eras according to the advances in technology that characterized them: stone tools and objects thus define the Stone Age, while the Bronze and Iron Ages are defined according to the metalworking techniques that allowed these materials to be widely used during these periods. Although these terms are somewhat general they are useful in linking together widely disparate geographical regions.

Assigning dates to events in Near Eastern history is problematic and controversial. Scholars do not always agree on specific dates and even general dates can change to reflect new research. The result is that various sources may yield dates that do not match. For example, dates given in this teacher resource may not always match dates given on the gallery labels due to the dynamic nature of research. Dates in the first millennium B.C. and later are generally secure because of several reliable data, including the record of a solar eclipse that took place on June 15, 763 B.C. Dates in the second millennium B.C. and earlier are more problematic because of the lack of such well-documented astronomical events or other data for this period. Scholars have reconstructed a reliable relative sequence of events that is defined by changes in political history documented in textual sources. For example, in Mesopotamia the rise to power of the Early Dynastic city-states was followed by the Akkadian dynasty; these time periods are thus called the Early Dynastic period and the Akkadian period. This relative sequence cannot be anchored with certainty to fixed dates, although general absolute dates can be approximately given.

Cuneiform Messages

Inscribed clay tablets dating to the end of the fourth millennium B.C. from the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk (modern Warka) and from southwestern Iran (ancient Elam) are the earliest known evidence for writing, slightly predating the advent of the Egyptian writing system. The primary impetus for this truly groundbreaking innovation was the need to record economic transactions, which developed hand in hand with the beginnings of urbanization and the need for storage of the agricultural surplus that accompanied it. The tablets from Uruk are probably written in the Sumerian language, in a script that is commonly referred to as proto-cuneiform, while the script, and therefore the language, used on the tablets from southwestern Iran—known as Proto-Elamite—remain undeciphered.

Image 4

Proto-cuneiform script, written with pictographs, was eventually replaced by about 2600 B.C. with a standardized system of abstract signs made up of wedge-shaped markings. Called **cuneiform** (Latin for "wedge-shaped"), it was written with a bevel-ended reed pressed into tablets of soft clay and was most commonly read from left to right. Cuneiform writing became widespread throughout the region and continued to be used as late as the first century A.D. Most tablets were pillow-shaped—slightly convex on both faces—and small enough to fit into the palm of a hand; some were encased in clay "envelopes" to prevent tampering with the signs written on them in unbaked clay.

Image 13

Scribes underwent lengthy training during which they learned to write the two major languages of the ancient Near East, Sumerian and Akkadian. Although they are not linguistically related, both were written using cuneiform script. Hundreds of different signs are known, many of which could be read either as a word (logographically) or as a sound or group of sounds (phonetically). To better understand the concept, imagine that a drawing of an apple can be interpreted by an English speaker as both the fruit "apple" and the letter "A." Although most signs were originally logographic, as the cuneiform writing system spread, phonetic signs developed in order to express names and grammatical features in languages other than Sumerian—a necessity in a region whose inhabitants spoke many different languages. For official written communications between correspondents with different native tongues, the preferred *lingua franca* was Akkadian, the Semitic language used by Mesopotamian kings of the late third millennium B.C. Even after it ceased to be spoken, Akkadian was used as an administrative language, much like Latin was used in the medieval Catholic Church.

Sometimes a glimpse of an important ancient people is primarily available through texts rather than artificats. The Hurrians, whose

language was neither Semitic nor Indo-European, occupied a vast area bordering the Mesopotamian plain to the north and east. They appear to have been a leading power in the ancient Near East as early as the third millennium B.C., but since, with the exception of Urkesh (modern Tell Mozan), few major Hurrian cities have been even partially excavated, it is not known whether their art had distinctive styles or motifs. Texts record the importance of the Hurrians but the archaeological evidence for their presence is tantalizingly elusive.

Image 9

It is a misconception that writing developed from a single early, complex script and naturally evolved into a simpler and more easily used alphabetic form. Not only did multiple and competing versions of early writing systems exist, but it seems that the complex system that eventually arose in the ancient Near East was deliberately retained because of its greater flexibility—not merely because simpler substitutes were unavailable. In fact, the earliest alphabetic script was developed in the trading center of Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of northern Syria around the mid-thirteenth century B.C. The Phoenician script, often thought to be the first alphabetic script, actually developed in the same region several centuries later, and would eventually provide the model for Greek and other European alphabets. Meanwhile cuneiform remained in widespread usage at this time and for many years to come.

The richness and sheer volume of cuneiform texts that have survived to the present day can be overwhelming. Mesopotamian literature includes the earliest recorded epic, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*; the first poetry, including love songs; and the first texts written by a named author—a series of hymns credited to Enheduanna, high priestess of the moon god Nanna in Ur, who lived during the time of the Akkadian empire (ca. 2350–2150 B.C.). The oldest known laws and legal decisions were inscribed on monuments by the kings who decreed them, most famously Hammurabi of Babylon (**FIG. 7**). Rituals were recorded in detail, including the care and feeding of cult images; omens were analyzed in order to prescribe the proper human response to signs sent by the gods. In fact, phenomena listed in omen texts, such as solar or lunar eclipses, were treated like coded messages "written" by the gods that needed to be interpreted by trained priests, much as cuneiform messages were read by scribes. The sheer act of writing—giving knowledge a tangible form, and communicating it across distances—shaped the conceptual framework of the ancient Near East.

Images 8, 10, 17, 19, 20, 28

Image 9

Texts could be inscribed not only on clay tablets, but on stone, metal, or clay sculptures, carved reliefs, or colored glazed ceramic, among other media (**FIG. 11**). The act of inscribing text undoubtedly had a ritual purpose in itself. Tablets and inscribed objects were built into the foundations of temples, where they would be hidden from view, as part of the process of consecrating the new building. These texts were primarily intended to convey messages to the gods, not to people.

Information was recorded on even the earliest tablets in two forms, writing and seal impressions. Cylinder and stamp seals were made of stone or other materials and engraved in **intaglio** so that, when pressed into clay, the carved design stood out in relief. Each was unique to its owner, and was used almost like a signature, rolled or stamped across clay tablets to mark and seal the information with its owner's official approval. Important individual documents could be encased within clay envelopes and impressed with the seals of witnesses to prevent tampering. Not only would a document like this convey the information recorded in its cuneiform text, but its seal impressions would in turn add another layer of information about the people responsible for gathering and disseminating this knowledge: seals often named the owners and their professions, and were decorated with images that must have held special significance.

Image 8

Image 4

Image 13

Text and image appear together on many ancient Near Eastern monuments, in such varied forms as cylinder seal impressions on cuneiform tablets, dedications carved on **votive** objects, and historical inscriptions on sculpted reliefs. While text and image sometimes relate to each other quite directly on many ancient Near Eastern monuments, inscriptions were not necessarily intended to explain the images they accompany, and vice versa. Most people, including the educated elite, could not read or write, and must have depended on visual, rather than textual, literacy in order to interpret meaning conveyed through images. Inscriptions could then be read aloud to an audience, adding another complementary or contrasting layer of information. Text and image are inseparable in many ancient Near Eastern monuments, and both were used to convey information to their audiences, whether human or divine.

Images 4, 8–10, 13, 17, 19, 20, 28

Image 19



FIGURE 11

Detail of *Statue of Gudea* (image 10), showing cuneiform inscription that reads in part: "Let the life of Gudea, who built the house, be long."

Animals and Humans

Interactions with animals shaped the world of the ancient people of the Near East: they shepherded flocks, guarded against dangerous wild animals, traveled long distances with the help of pack animals, hunted for subsistence and for sport, rode horses into battle, and marveled at powerful beasts and exotic creatures from distant lands. Ritual observance, whether in the form of a sacrifice, a ceremonial hunt, or in the decoration of sacred objects, was deeply connected with the animal world. Many animals, including dogs, sheep, goats, donkeys, pigs, and cats, were first domesticated in the Near East. (In contrast to modern perceptions about the Middle East, camels were not common in Image 30 the ancient Near East until the first centuries A.D., when camel caravans traveled the long-distance trade routes that were forerunners of the Silk Road.) It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the art of the ancient Near East includes some of the most vivid images of animals to be found anywhere, appearing in forms ranging from painted pottery and clay sculptures to carved stone and sculpture in precious metals. Concepts of divinity, kingship, and the fertility of the natural world were frequently expressed through compositions depicting animals that decorated Images 3, 6, 9, 12, 17, 24, 25 temple equipment, ritual and ceremonial objects, and **votive** gifts.

From earliest times, painted pottery was elaborately decorated with figures of animals, sometimes with key features stylized or exaggerated. Image 1 During the late fourth to early third millennium B.C. in Elam (southwestern Iran), craftspeople created remarkable depictions of animals behaving like humans—a theme that may have related to early myths Image 3 or fables, now lost.

Fierce animals such as bulls and lions are often shown locked in combat, perhaps meant to embody the strong opposing forces in nature. These animals, as well as hawks, stags, and other powerful beasts, could be linked with certain gods whose qualities they shared; the storm god Adad was linked to the bull in part because of the similarity between the rumble of thunder and the roar of a mighty bull. However, the gods of the ancient Near East did not commonly appear with animal features. Occasionally, gods appeared with wings Image 19 and other birdlike elements, but they remain recognizably human. Thus a depiction of a bull, for example, would be understood to refer to the storm god's presence and powers, rather than to represent the god himself in animal form. Additionally, powerful animals such as lions, bulls, and raptors were depicted because of their own qualities Images 9, 16 of strength and fierceness, not exclusively as symbols of the gods. These same qualities could enhance a human figure through the Image 2 addition of animal attributes, perhaps referencing the supernatural

FIGURE 12

How a rhyton was used



Detail of bell krater showing, on the right, a banqueter dispensing liquid from a rhyton (with forepart of a horse) into a phiale, a type of cup. [*Bell krater*, ca. 400 B.C. Red-figure. Greek, Attic. Terracotta; H. 13 ½ in. (34.5 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien]



Rhyton Terminating in the Forepart of a Wild Cat (image 27)
The rhyton was filled through a large opening at the top. Liquid was dispensed through the spout on the wild cat's chest.

world. Especially favored as gifts for the gods were luxurious vessels in ceramic, stone, or metal in the form of animals or animal heads that were used by elite worshippers in rituals, a process described in texts from the Hittite capital dating to the mid-second millennium B.C. These vessels often took the form of rhytons (FIG. 12). Image 17

Images of kingship were closely linked with certain animals. The royal hunt, in which the king could appear alone, mounted, or in a horse- or donkey-drawn chariot while shooting swiftly running animals

with arrows, defined the ruler's attributes of strength, skill, and mastery of the natural world. Lion hunts were specifically restricted to royalty, and kings for a millennia even described themselves as lions, having taken on the mantle of the animal's power by defeating it in combat (**FIG. 13**). The royal hunt motif was already an ancient one when it was used in the decoration of fine silver and gold bowls depicting the Sasanian king hunting during the fifth to sixth centuries A.D.

Image 30



FIGURE 13

Relief-carved boulder called the "lion-hunt stele." A "priest-king" shoots a lion with bow and arrow at bottom, while the same figure spears another lion at top. This stele is thought to be one of the earliest examples of pictorial narrative in art. Mesopotamia, excavated at Uruk, Late Uruk period, ca. 3300–3000 B.C. Basalt; 31½ in. (80 cm). Iraq Museum, Baghdad

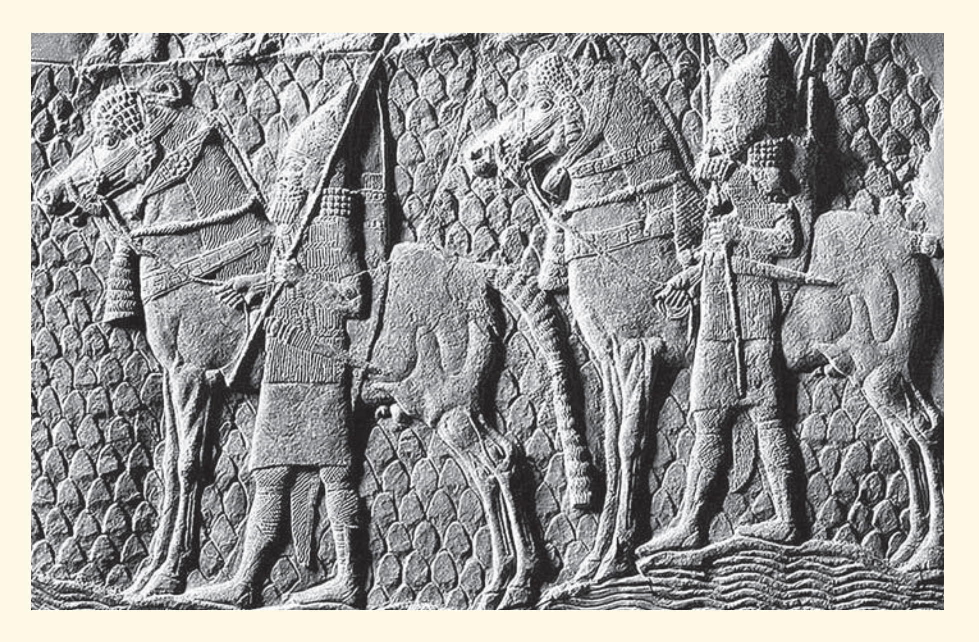


FIGURE 14

Relief fragment of cavalrymen along a stream in mountainous terrain. Mesopotamia, excavated at Nineveh, Palace of Sennacherib, Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Sennacherib, ca. 704–681 B.C. Gypsum alabaster; 20⅞ × 33½ in. (53 × 85 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1932 (32.143.16)



FIGURE 15

Relief fragment of lions relaxing in a garden. Mesopotamia, excavated at Nineveh, Palace of Ashurbanipal, Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurbanipal, ca. 668–627 B.C. Gypsum alabaster; 38 ⅝ × 70 ⅛ in. (98 × 178 cm). The Trustees of the British Museum, London

The horse was another animal of paramount importance (**FIG. 14**). After 2000 B.C. horses entered the Near East in large numbers, most likely from areas to the east and north. A defining moment in the history of the horse came with the invention of the war chariot in the seventeenth century B.C. Whether it was the Hittites or the Mitanni who can claim credit for this advance, it conferred an enormous advantage in the primarily infantry-based warfare of the ancient world from the second millennium B.C. onwards. It is clear from the **Amarna Letters**, an archive of correspondence between fourteenth-century B.C. rulers of the Near East and Egypt, that horses and chariots were among the most prized commodities in the elaborate system of royal gift exchange at this time.

Rulers could demonstrate the vast reach of their domains by collecting rare and exotic animals from distant lands. According to **cuneiform** texts, Assyrian kings set up royal parks, similar to private zoos. Here they not only gathered elephants, lions, apes, and other animals but also planted lush gardens with non-native flora such as grapevines and date palms (**FIG. 15**). Territories subject to Assyrian rule were required to offer the riches of their lands, including both animal products and the living creatures themselves, to the Assyrian kings as tribute.

Image 21

The Royal Image

Images of humans, especially of rulers, tend to emphasize ideal characteristics rather than naturalistic ones. Royal images usually convey either piety (in the ruler's role as servant of the gods and builder of temples) or might (in the ruler's role as protector and enlarger of his realm). Images of royalty in pious attitudes with clasped hands and serene gazes generally took the form of sculpture in the round. Such statues were placed in temples where they represented the ruler's Image 10 eternal presence. Rulers engaged in more dynamic acts of piety, such as ritual or building activities, were more likely to be shown in Image 19 relief since the format allows the narrative action to unfold across the surface. Royal images illustrating might, with the ruler shown victorious over a vanquished enemy or hunting lions (see "Animals and Humans," pp. 30–33), were most often shown in large reliefs on walls within the palace complex, metal vessels, or on cylinder seals which Image 30 conveyed similar narratives on a minute scale.

Although rulers sometimes were identified by their names and lists of their accomplishments, their images were rarely intended to Image 11 be portraits or likenesses, although some may appear so to us today. They were generally shown with idealized physical features that were meant to convey strength, wisdom, or other qualities associated with Images 10, 29 good leadership (FIG. 16). As with many representations in ancient Near Eastern art, the consistency of such artistic conventions allowed these concepts to be clearly expressed in a society in which few people could read and relied instead on visual literacy.

While statues of rulers were not meant to be portraits, they did possess a life force when set up in their original contexts. We know this because texts record that certain rituals were performed in order to "bring them to life"; they were bathed, fed, and cared for, much like statues of deities (see "Communicating with the Divine," pp. 39–42). Images of rulers were thus invested with power in their visual form—power that could also be taken away. For instance, many royal images were found with features such as eyes and noses mutilated by conquering rulers, suggesting that the destruction of the image was believed to also destroy its power and life force.

Royal images are defined by remarkably consistent attributes, in spite of some variations over time and place. In the ancient Near East, headdresses are generally the most recognizable markers of an individual's status. In fact, the donning of headgear itself indicates Images 10, 11 elevated status of some sort. For the ruler, the brimmed cap is the most widespread head attire during the later third and early second Image 19 millennia B.C., while later rulers depict themselves wearing a fez-like

cap. In one well-known instance, a ruler did not merely deify himself in writing, but even adopted the horned crown reserved as a marker of divinity in his representations (FIG. 17) (see "Communicating with the Divine," pp. 39–42). This appropriation of the symbolism of gods was perceived in subsequent periods as an act of hubris that led directly to the downfall of his dynasty.

Other aspects of a figure's appearance that help identify him as an elite personage include a well-groomed beard and mustache and fine garments. Rulers are uniformly depicted in this manner, showcasing their refinement through their mastery of the civilized arts of grooming and dress. While the details may differ in specific cases, the overall effect is the same, whether the ruler depicts himself with a short but elaborately woven kilt in Hittite Anatolia (FIG. 18) or a long, fringed

Image 11

FIGURE 16

Attributes of royalty

As shown in *Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II* (detail, image 19)



garment decorated with palmettes and fantastic creatures in the reliefs of the Assyrian kings.

Beyond these aspects of personal appearance, rulers could also underscore their status by including various symbols of their office in their depictions. These include the rod and ring symbol handed to Hammurabi by the god Shamash (**FIG. 7**), an explicit statement that the king's power to dispense justice and create order in his kingdom derives directly from the gods. Weapons, such as a bow or a sword, are common attributes that refer to the ruler's might in the midst of battle, even when no military action is depicted. Lions are also associated with depictions of rulers from a very early period, and this imagery persists for millennia (**FIGS. 13, 19**) (see "Animals and Humans," pp. 30–33). The strength and ferocity of the lion is closely identified with that of the ruler, who is often shown grappling with lions or slaughtering them, and thus claiming their power for himself. Even when not shown in combat, lions retain a close association with the office of the ruler and often appear in royal contexts.

Image 19

Images 9, 25

Depictions of rulers generally emphasize their physical strength, not only as a sign of their mastery over dangerous beasts and enemy troops, but as an indication that they possess the essential qualities necessary for effective leadership. For instance, texts written during the reign of the late-third millennium B.C. ruler Gudea use the phrase "strong arm" to describe the ruler's physical power—a description



FIGURE 17

Victory stele of Naram-Sin. The Akkadian king Naram-Sin is the largest figure in the scene. He wears a horned crown, an attribute of divinity, and treads upon the bodies of defeated enemies. Astral symbols of the gods Shamash and Ishtar appear in the sky above. Mesopotamia, Sippar; found at Susa, Iran. Akkadian period, reign of Naram-Sin, ca. 2254–2218 B.C. Limestone; 78 ¾ × 41⅜ in. (200 × 105 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris

paralleled in Gudea's representation in sculpture, where he is shown with an extremely well-muscled right arm. Other metaphoric phrases in the languages of the ancient Near East indicate that even more intangible qualities could be expressed in visual form. The epithet "wide-eared" indicates wisdom, a quality obtained through careful listening, which could thus be expressed in depictions of wise rulers through an emphasis on representing almost protuberant ears. The somewhat exaggerated features of rulers such as Gudea or the Assyrian kings, with their enlarged features and bulging muscles, were thus not meant to represent how these rulers actually appeared in life, but rather to show them as the embodiment of qualities such as strength, wisdom, and piety.

Image 10

Image 11

Rulers are also identified as such through the activities in which they are shown participating. Among their characteristic deeds are military campaigns, lion hunts, the performance of rituals, and the building of temples, in all of which they are shown taking an active role. For example, rulers record in texts that they actually participated in making the symbolic first bricks laid as the foundation of a new temple, to the extent of gathering and mixing the mud for those bricks (**FIG. 23**). Activities with important symbolic significance such as these were often recorded in texts, in which rulers list the achievements of their reigns and express their desire to have their names live on in the memories of later generations through recollection of their great accomplishments.



FIGURE 18

Relief from King's Gate. This powerful male figure wears the typical short, tightly wrapped skirt worn by images of Hittite gods and clasps an axe to his chest, another indication of his might. The relief originally adorned a monumental stone gateway at the Hittite capital. Anatolia, Hattusa (modern Boğazköy), Hittite Empire period, ca. 1350–1200 B.C. Limestone. Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations



FIGURE 19

Detail of a relief fragment of a lion hunt. In a display of royal prowess, the Assyrian kings often showed themselves hunting lions, on reliefs, seals, and other forms of official art. Here, Ashurbanipal grasps a lion while an attendant waits behind him with arrows ready. Mesopotamia, excavated at Nineveh, Palace of Ashurbanipal, Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurbanipal, ca. 668–627 B.C. Gypsum alabaster; entire slab 25 × 28 in. (63.5 × 71 cm). The Trustees of The British Museum, London

One crucial way in which a ruler could live on in this manner was through his representations, such as those featured in this resource. In fact, the survival of many of these representations to the present day would probably have been gratifying to the rulers who created them. We know through texts that rulers specified the use of durable and precious materials, such as diorite or bronze, in creating their images so that they would last for many generations. They would have been well aware of the monuments of earlier rulers that were still visible during their lifetimes, such as the steles of Hammurabi and Naram-Sin (**FIGS. 7, 17**), publicly displayed for many centuries in Mesopotamian cities. The fact that these monuments were taken as spoils of war by invading Elamite troops and carried off to the Elamite capital of Susa in the twelfth century B.C., nearly a millennium after the reign of Naram-Sin and six centuries after that of Hammurabi eloquently demonstrates the lasting power in these images of rulership.

Communicating with the Divine

GODS AND GODDESSES

Ancient Near Eastern spiritual beliefs were largely polytheistic and were primarily concerned with the natural and cosmic forces that affected people most profoundly. The pantheon of gods and goddesses at any one time was considerably large; accumulated written records list over 3,000 names of deities but their powers were not all equal. Examination of ancient myths, legends, ritual texts, and images reveals that most deities were anthropomorphic, or conceived in human terms. They could be male or female, and often had families, including children. Gods and goddesses generally lived a life of ease and slumber, with needs for food, drink, housing, and care that mirrored those of humans. In fact, according to ancient Near Eastern mythology, humankind was created by the gods to ease their burdens and provide them with the daily care and food they required. However, they were still supreme beings: immortal, transcendent, awesome, and mostly distant. Priests worshiped the great gods and goddesses of the pantheon in rituals at religious centers, but ordinary people had no direct contact with these deities. In their homes people worshiped personal gods, minor deities who played a parental role and who could intercede on their behalf with the great gods to ensure health and protection for a worshipper and his or her family.

Image 18

Certain gods and goddesses were associated with astral phenomena such as the sun, moon, and stars, while others were connected to forces of nature such as fresh or ocean waters or winds. These cosmic features were often depicted as divine emblems or symbols. Many gods and goddesses were also linked with specific animals. Visually, deities could be alluded to by their emblems or animal forms as effectively as by their anthropomorphic form. For example, Inanna/Ishtar, the goddess of sexual love and war, could be represented by her emblem, a rosette, or by her associated animal, a lion, as well as by a figure in human form understood to be the goddess.

Image 15

Image 23

As early as the third millennium B.C., **cuneiform** tablets indicate that gods and goddesses were also associated with cities. Each community worshiped its city's patron deity in the city's main temple. For instance, Inanna/Ishtar was worshiped at the city of Uruk. This association of certain cities with a specific deity was celebrated in both ritual and myth. A city's political strength could be measured by the prominence of its deity in the overall hierarchy of the gods.

Although deities were thought to live primarily in the heavens or in the underworld, their presence was not restricted to the supernatural realm, nor was it confined to a single location. For instance, gods

and goddesses were believed to be physically present in the world of humans in the form of their cult statues, which were created by their human servants. However, a **cult statue** was not considered to have this "enlivened" status until it was dedicated, when certain rituals were performed in order to "bring it to life" or imbue it with the divine presence of the deity that it represented. After these rituals, the image was placed in a temple, believed to be the deity itself, and considered

FIGURE 20

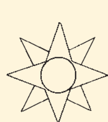
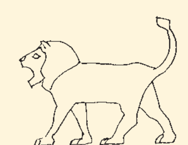
Characteristics and attributes of divine figures

Illustrations after those by Tessa Rickards

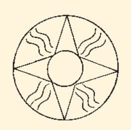
Characteristics that help distinguish deities from other human figures include:

- Horned headdress
  Images 16, 20
- Flounced robe
  Images 15, 16
- Activities and settings, such as libations or the presence of a temple façade
  Images 17, 19
- Animal attributes or cosmic symbols
  Images 15, 23

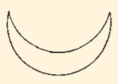
Symbols and attributes of selected Mesopotamian divinities include:

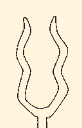
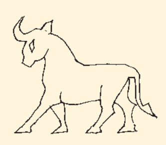
Inanna/Ishtar, the goddess of sexual love and war: a rosette or star; weapons emanating from her shoulders; or a lion. Inanna is the Sumerian name of the goddess, while Ishtar is her Akkadian name.



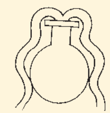
Shamash, the sun god and god of justice: a sun disk; rays emanating from his shoulders; a saw



Sin, the moon god: a crescent moon

Adad, the storm god: forked lightning; a bull




Ea, the god of wisdom and sweet waters: a creature with the forepart of a goat and tail of a fish, called a goat-fish; streams of water emanating from his shoulders or from a vessel held in his hands

to have the same needs as the deity. It was therefore washed, dressed, given food and drink, and lavishly adorned. Texts refer to chests, owned by the divinity, filled with gold rings, pendants, rosettes, stars, and other types of ornaments that could be used to embellish the cult images. The statues themselves are described in texts as fashioned out of wood and other precious materials, which might explain why so few are preserved. However, depictions of deities are frequently found on an array of other artifacts, including architectural elements, relief sculpture, vessels, jewelry, and seals. Representations of deities invested these objects with divine power and protection. Gods and goddesses are usually distinguished visually from mortals by their greater size and by the presence of horned headgear. The style and details of these divine images varied from region to region, as did the practices of their cults; however, certain characteristics of divinity remain more or less consistent through time and throughout the ancient Near East (FIG. 20).

Images 16, 17

FANTASTIC CREATURES

Imaginary or fantastic creatures are frequently found in ancient Near Eastern art. They are usually conceived of as composite in character—combining naturally occurring anatomical parts in an unnatural manner, at times making them appear monstrous or demonic. Even the simple addition of wings to an animal such as a lion was understood to transform it into a fantastic creature. Each of these various beasts embodied supernatural power—in some this power was harmful, in others it was protective.

Images 12, 14, 19, 20, 22

Image 25

For people in ancient times the world was full of fantastic creatures—both good ones and bad ones—that constantly had to be appeased, chased away, or enlisted for protection. When depicted, some took on protective powers against the very evil that they or other creatures represented; others were innately positive and helpful spirits. Priests may have dressed in animal skins for certain rituals as a way of achieving the same effect. Certain composite animals, such as the human-headed lions and bulls that guarded the Assyrian palaces, wear horned headdresses—typically worn by gods in the ancient Near East but here perhaps meant to express that the protective power of these animals derived from the divine realm.

Image 20

While the specific identity of most of these creatures is not known, their function is often suggested by their appearance or by the context in which they are depicted. Images of composite beings were frequently borrowed from other cultures: the sphinx came to Mesopotamia from Egypt, and creatures such as the griffin from the ancient Near Eastern world eventually found their way to Greece, Rome, and, finally, Western Europe. Today these creatures are often referred to as monsters or demons, although these modern terms do not fully and accurately describe how the people of the ancient Near East would have viewed them.

Images 14, 22

FIGURE 21

Amulet with Lamashtu demon. Lamashtu was a malevolent female demon, who was thought to be especially dangerous to pregnant women and those in childbirth. Images of Lamashtu were thought to drive her away and protect the vulnerable, such as the sick man mentioned in the inscription on this amulet. Mesopotamia or Iran, early 1st millennium B.C. Obsidian; 2 ¼ × 1 ⅞ in. (5.7 × 4.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, James N. Spear Gift, 1984 (1984.348)



RELIGION, MAGIC, AND MEDICINE

In the ancient Near East religion, magic, and medicine were not clearly differentiated from one another. Diseases were often attributed to the work of deities or demons acting on behalf of deities, as punishment for sins. Priests, magicians, **shamans**, and physicians all appealed to supernatural beings to affect the health of their patients. Exorcism, which drove a demon from the human being that it inhabited and transferred it to another person or object, was a commonly used technique. Amulets depicting a particular demon were a practical means of **apotropaic** protection against the creature itself and were also used to protect against and cure illness and other misfortunes (FIG. 21).

Image 2

The Afterlife

For most of the history of the ancient Near East, the concept of an afterlife does not appear to have occupied a central position in the visual arts, as it did in ancient Egypt. In Mesopotamia, most human beings were thought to survive after death as spirits or ghosts inhabiting the netherworld, described in poetry and myth as a bleak place defined by darkness and mourning where spirits ate clay instead of bread and wore feathers instead of clothing. Descendants had a duty to make offerings, including food and drink, to their deceased ancestors; if not appeased with the proper gifts, the spirits of the dead could return to the earth to haunt the living. The practice of giving offerings to the dead was especially important to rulers, whose lasting fame depended on the proper maintenance of their statues. Image 10

For rulers and other elite members of society, immortality could also be obtained through heroic deeds, which would be remembered by later generations. Some of this desire for renown after death can be seen in the inscriptions left by kings below the foundations of temples and palaces, often recording their achievements—including the con- Image 9 struction of such monumental buildings—and exhorting future kings to honor and maintain the structures they have founded. Although kings and queens were buried with splendid jewelry and grave goods, funerary rituals like those carried out in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, where dozens of richly adorned attendants were sacrificed to accompany the primary occupants of certain burials, are rare in the ancient Near Image 7 East. Most people were buried in simple graves, sometimes accompanied by a string of beads, a cylinder seal, or other personal effects, either in cemeteries or beneath the floors of their houses, which continued to be inhabited by their descendants. A remarkable exception to this rule appears at Palmyra in the first to third centuries A.D., when monumental tombs sealed by carved gravestones commemorating the name and image of the dead came into wide usage, perhaps reflecting influence from Greco-Roman burial traditions. Image 28

Materials and Techniques

Mesopotamia's acidic soil and the periodic flooding of its major rivers are two of the main factors contributing to the poor preservation of much of the archaeological remains of the ancient Near East. Because of these and other factors, only a tiny fraction of the riches of the ancient civilizations that inhabited this region have survived into the present. However, the objects found in archaeological excavations demonstrate that many technological advances were first made here: casting in metal was developed, glass was invented, and pottery was elevated to high levels of skill and refinement.

The materials used in art of the ancient Near East were deliberately chosen with features such as color and hardness as deciding factors. Gold and silver were considered to have specific magical and **apotropaic** properties, as did the lapis lazuli and carnelian stones that they were most frequently combined with to create objects and ornaments. Precious metals were referenced in mythological literature to convey concepts and attributes associated with deities, primarily because their Images 15, 16, 18 color, shine, and brilliance were deemed fitting for gods and goddesses. One of the most important categories of objects that have not survived but are described in ancient texts is that of cult images of gods and goddesses. Some of these were composite statues, in which various materials were combined for a dazzling and lifelike appearance—incorporating bodies of wood or ivory, wigs and headdresses in semiprecious stone, and other elements in stone and metal.

STONE

In the ancient Near East, stone was used for sculpture—both in the round and in relief—for vessels and cylinder seals, and as elements of jewelry and inlay material. A wide variety of stones were available Images 5, 19, 20 for the craftsperson to use. Limestone and sandstone were locally available in Mesopotamia, and gypsum alabaster, particularly well suited for carving in fine detail, was common in Assyria. Harder stones—such as diorite, which was prized for its great durability Image 10 and high sheen—were found in places like Oman and southern Iran and distributed far and wide. Gemstones such as agate, carnelian, and lapis lazuli, much in demand for making small objects such as cylinder seals and beads for jewelry, had to be imported from regions Image 7 further to the east such as Afghanistan and India. The considerable expense required to obtain and transport stones over great distances presumably added to their prestige value.

The stonemason had access to a variety of tools. Stones were quarried and shaped with pounders and grinders made of even harder

stone, as well as picks and pointers made of **copper alloy,** and later iron. Hammers, chisels, and droves were used for finer cutting and shaping. The finest details were worked with drills fitted with stone bits, using sand as an abrasive. Quartzite, sandstone, sand, and emery were used for the final stages of polishing. To create a stone cylinder seal, the seal cutter could have employed a horizontal **lathe** and cutting disk for engraving designs on stone as well as a bow drill to perforate the seal.

Image 8

IVORY AND SHELL

While many animal-derived commodities such as leather, textiles made of hair and wool, and feathers must have been widely used in the ancient Near East, only durable products such as ivory and shell survive to represent this large class of material. Similar techniques seem to have been used for carving both these materials as well as wood and bone.

Ivory was obtained from the tusks of elephants or from the large teeth of hippopotamus—both of which could be found in southern Egypt and Syria during ancient times. Carved ivory plaques were often used together with wood, especially ebony, in the manufacture of luxurious furniture for royal palaces, where the contrast between the dark and light elements would have highlighted the richness of both materials (FIG. 22). However, it is primarily the ivory that survives archaeologically; most of the evidence we have for this type of furniture lacks the wooden frames into which the ivory plaques and supports would have been set. Ivory was also used for small, precious objects, such as lidded boxes, figurines, and even ceremonial horse trappings, like frontlets and blinkers. The carved surface of the ivory was



FIGURE 22

Chair back with a tree pattern. Mesopotamia, excavated at Kalhu (ancient Nimrud), Fort Shalmaneser, Neo-Assyrian period, ca. 800–700 B.C. Ivory, embedded in a modern wood framework; 13⅞ × 19⅝ in. (35.2 × 49.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1959 (59.107.1)

Image 14

Image 21

often partially covered with gold foil and inlaid with brightly colored semiprecious stones or glass, for an overall effect of brilliant color contrasts. Most ancient ivories have been stripped of their gold overlay for melting down and reuse, which gives them the very different appearance they have today. Ivory appears to have been a treasured material, and many thousands of pieces were collected in the palaces of the Assyrian kings of the early first millennium B.C., presumably as booty or tribute from the territories they controlled in Syria and the Levant.

Shell, either from marine or freshwater mollusks, was widely used to make personal adornments such as beads, rings, bangles, and even cylinder and stamp seals. The shape of certain shells lent them to being used as utensils and containers, especially lamps and ladles. Inlays made of carved shell, particularly the iridescent mother-of-pearl lining the shells of pearl oysters, were set into dark stone backgrounds that highlighted the vivid color contrast. This type of design was used to decorate boxes, musical instruments, gaming boards, and probably luxury furniture during the Early Dynastic period in the third millennium B.C.

METALWORKING

Images 2, 6, 9, 11, 18, 24

The earliest use of metals and the subsequent development of metallurgy first took place in the ancient Near East. Metal objects included sculpture in the round and in relief, vessels, weapons, cylinder seals, elements of jewelry, and inlay material. The main metals used were copper, iron, lead, gold, and silver. Alloys, particularly bronze—made of copper and tin—were also widely employed. Metal ores were lacking in Mesopotamia proper but were available in neighboring regions. Copper and silver were locally available in Anatolia and western Iran. Gold was imported from Nubia and possibly Anatolia and ancient Bulgaria. Tin was probably imported a great distance from eastern Iran and Afghanistan, but it may also have been available in Anatolia and western Iran.

While the early history of copper alloy and casting is not yet fully understood, the earliest examples of both come from the ancient Near East. We know that metalworkers cast solid and hollow figures using the **lost-wax** technique. In solid bronze casting, figures are usually first formed entirely in wax. The wax is then covered with a layer of clay, and the form is fired, which causes the wax to melt and run out and the clay to turn into a terracotta mold. Finally, molten metal is poured into the space where the wax was, and when it has completely cooled, the mold is broken away. Alternatively, with the more complicated procedure called hollow casting, the wax model is formed around an anchored clay core. This core remains as the inside of the metal statuette. This technique has the advantage of reducing the amount of metal necessary. In either technique, after cooling, the surface of the metal can be polished, and details can be added with pointed tools.



FIGURE 23

Foundation figure of king Shulgi of Ur carrying a basket. Texts describe rituals for making the first brick of a new temple, in which the ruler himself participated. This figure, which would have been ceremonially deposited in the temple's foundation, shows the ruler Shulgi carrying a basket of earth for making the first brick. Mesopotamia, excavated at Nippur (modern Nuffar), Ur III period, ca. 2100–2000 B.C. Copper; 12 ¼ × 2 3⁄16 in. (31.1 × 5.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1959 (59.41.1)

Elements of gold and silver jewelry were generally produced using techniques such as hammering, **repoussé**, **chasing**, punching, **filigree**, **granulation**, and inlay work. They could be solid, hollow, or mold cast with details added by means of any of the same techniques. Craftspeople also used precious metals for vessels, ceremonial weapons, and other prestige objects, all of which could be cast or made by hand, with details subsequently added by means of the aforementioned techniques.

Images 7, 15

Images 3, 12, 16, 17, 25, 27, 29, 30

CERAMIC AND GLASS

Clay was readily available throughout Mesopotamia, and is the most ubiquitous material in the archaeological record of the ancient Near East. Objects made of clay, from molded or hand-formed figurines and plaques found in houses and shrines to **cuneiform** tablets and pottery, were used by nearly everyone. Pottery was first developed during the mid-sixth millennium B.C., and the time-saving innovation of the potter's wheel may have been introduced as early as the fourth millennium B.C. Some of the finest painted pottery dates to the prehistoric period; later pottery is often more utilitarian and plain in appearance, although there are notable exceptions.

Images 4, 13

Image 1

Glass and vitreous materials such as faience were manufactured using techniques similar to ceramics and metalworking. Glassmaking on a large scale began in Mesopotamia during the middle of the second millennium B.C., and may have developed out of one or both of these traditions. Both faience and glass were then used to make beads, cylinder seals, and other objects. Glassblowing was not developed until the Roman period during the first century B.C., when it is thought to have come to Rome from the Levant after the area's annexation to the Roman world in 64 B.C.

BUILDING MATERIALS

The primary building materials of the ancient Near East were stone, mud brick, and timber. Mesopotamia was (as is Iraq today) a rich source of good-quality clay, and the mud bricks made from it were the most characteristic building material of the region. Even in Assyria, where stone and timber were readily available, mud brick was used to build the massive royal palaces of the early first millennium B.C., suggesting a preference beyond the simply utilitarian. Perhaps the long tradition of building in mud brick, and the rituals dating back to the third millennium B.C. in which the ruler himself placed the first brick in a temple's foundation, led to the favored use of this material even in areas where stone was plentiful (**FIG. 23**).

Molded bricks—mud bricks pressed into a mold, which gave them a decorated surface similar to carved stone relief—first appeared in the later second millennium B.C., when they were used to decorate the facades of temples in Mesopotamia and Iran. Although the earliest examples were made of unglazed baked brick, the monumental molded-brick facades of the sixth century B.C.—Ishtar Gate and Processional Way in Babylon—were glazed in bright colors, lending them a powerful visual impact as well as protection against the weather.

Image 23

The technique for making mud brick in the Middle East today probably differs little from the ancient procedure. Chopped straw or other temper is mixed with wet soil and formed in rectangular molds, after which it is set out to dry in the sun, or fired in the case of baked brick. If it is properly protected against weathering, usually by a well-maintained coat of plaster, mud brick is remarkably durable. However, rain and wind eventually erode mud-brick construction. In the ancient Near East foundations of new buildings were set on the mud brick rubble of their predecessors. Rulers had a duty to maintain and restore the monumental temples, palaces, and ziggurats constructed by their predecessors; they were well aware that their own grand buildings would crumble over time, requiring the same consideration from their descendants.

Another important material for building was **bitumen**. Also known as tar or asphalt, bitumen is an oily, black petroleum substance available throughout the Middle East at certain locations where it seeps

up to the earth's surface. It was used as a sealant protecting against dampness and water, and as an all-purpose adhesive in construction. With exposure to air, bitumen solidifies enough to be carved and could also be used for molding and modeling objects. Image 16

PAINTING

Painting in the ancient Near East seems to have survived most commonly as decoration on pottery vessels. While some wall paintings remain, it seems to have been more popular to add paint to the relief decoration on the walls instead. Texts describe the interior walls of palaces that are decorated with brightly painted carved stone reliefs, and many palace wall reliefs indeed show traces of color. Pigments were made from various natural substances, such as bitumen or mineral compounds.

Image 1

Image 19

Image 5

Quick List of the Works of Art



1 Storage Jar Decorated with Mountain Goats
Chalcolithic period, ca. 3800–3700 B.C.
Iran



2 Striding Horned Figure
Proto-Elamite period, ca. 3100–2900 B.C.
Iran or Mesopotamia



3 Kneeling Bull Holding a Spouted Vessel
Proto-Elamite period, ca. 3100–2900 B.C.
Iran



4 Proto-Cuneiform Tablet with Seal Impressions
Jemdet Nasr period, ca. 3100–2900 B.C.
Mesopotamia



5 Standing Male Figure
Early Dynastic I–II period, ca. 2900–2600 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Eshnunna (modern Tell Asmar)



6 Vessel Stand with Ibex Support
Early Dynastic III period, ca. 2600–2350 B.C.
Mesopotamia



7 Headdress
Early Dynastic IIIa period, ca. 2600–2500 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Ur (modern Tell al-Muqayyar)



8 Cylinder Seal and Modern Impression: Hunting Scene
Late Akkadian period, ca. 2250–2100 B.C.
Mesopotamia



9 Foundation Peg in the Form of the Forepart of a Lion
Early Bronze Age, ca. 2200–2100 B.C.
Syria, probably from Urkesh (modern Tell Mozan)



10 Statue of Gudea
Neo-Sumerian period, reign of Gudea, ca. 2090 B.C.
Mesopotamia, probably from Girsu (modern Tello)



11 Head of a Ruler
Early Bronze Age, ca. 2300–2000 B.C.
Iran or Mesopotamia



12 Shaft-Hole Axe
Bronze Age, ca. 2000 B.C.
Bactria-Margiana (Central Asia)



13 Cuneiform Tablet and Case with Seal Impressions
Old Assyrian Trading Colony period, ca. 1950–1836 B.C.
Anatolia, probably from Kanesh (modern Kültepe)



14 Furniture Support
Old Assyrian Trading Colony period, ca. 1800–1700 B.C.
Anatolia, probably from Acemhöyük



15 Pendants and Beads
Old Babylonian period,
ca. 1800–1600 B.C.
Mesopotamia, said to be from Dilbat



16 Helmet with Divine Figures
Middle Elamite period,
ca. 1500–1100 B.C.
Iran



17 Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Stag
Hittite Empire period, ca. 1400–1200 B.C.
Anatolia



18 Enthroned Deity
Late Bronze Age,
ca. 1400–1200 B.C.
Levant



19 Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II
Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Kalhu (modern Nimrud)



20 Human-Headed Winged Lion
Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Kalhu (modern Nimrud)



21 Figure of a Tribute Bearer
Neo-Assyrian period, ca. 800–700 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Kalhu (modern Nimrud)



22 Plaques in the Form of Sphinxes
Iron Age II,
ca. 800–700 B.C.
Syria



23 Panel with Striding Lion
Neo-Babylonian period, reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, 604–562 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Babylon (modern Hillah)



24 Incense Burner
ca. 500 B.C.
Southwestern Arabia



25 Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Leonine Creature
Achaemenid period, ca. 600–500 B.C.
Iran



26 Relief Fragment of Attendants Carrying Food
Achaemenid period, ca. 358–338 B.C.
Iran, excavated at Persepolis (modern Takht-i Jamshid)



27 Rhyton Terminating in the Forepart of a Wild Cat
Parthian period,
ca. 100 B.C.–100 A.D.
Iran



28 Gravestone
ca. 100–300 A.D.
Syria, probably from Palmyra



29 Head of a King
Sasanian period,
ca. 300–400 A.D.
Iran



30 Plate with a Hunting Scene
Sasanian period,
ca. 400–500 A.D.
Iran

1 Storage Jar Decorated with Mountain Goats

Chalcolithic period, ca. 3800–3700 B.C.
Iran
Painted ceramic; H. 20 7/8 in. (53 cm)
Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1959 (59.52)

People of the ancient Near East used the abundant supply of clay to construct bricks for their cities and also as a surface upon which to record their histories, religious beliefs, and business transactions. In addition, clay was widely used for making pottery—so much so that archaeologists find more pottery in the ruins of ancient cities than any other form of art.

In the fourth millennium B.C. in central and southwestern Iran, painted decoration on pottery like this large jar reached a new level of sophistication. Combinations of geometric patterns, birds, and animals were silhouetted in dark brown on buff clay. These fine vessels were often found in tombs and therefore may have been used in religious or burial rituals.

This ovoid storage jar is a masterpiece of early pottery making, incorporating a design that is stylized but not static. A mountain goat, or ibex, stands in profile on the topmost of six bands, which circles the widest part of this large jar and emphasizes its great girth. The curves of its greatly enlarged horns echo the circular form of the jar, as do the curved spaces between the animal's legs. The ibex possesses great energy and animation—a sensation created by the sharp projections of the ears, tail, tufted hair on the muzzle and fetlocks, and the sweeping curve of the horns. Straight lines alternating with zig-zag patterns frame the space on each side of the animal. The design unit of an ibex within a geometric frame is repeated twice more around the circumference of the jar. The overall artistic effect is one of movement and dynamism. The slightly irregular shape of the pot suggests it either was built up by hand with coils of clay or was thrown on a slow wheel.

QUESTIONS

- How did the potter arrange the decoration to emphasize the shape of this pot? Notice the variety of forms and geometric shapes in the design. What do you notice about the silhouette of the ibex?
- What material did the potter use to make this vessel? Which techniques might have been used? Consider the many different ways clay was used in the ancient Near East.
- Discuss how a large pot like this might have been used.

COMPARE with images 6 and 24, looking at the rendering and pose of the ibex. Why might certain animals, such as ibexes and lions, recur in the art of the ancient Near East continuously over a long span of time?



2 Striding Horned Figure

Proto-Elamite period, ca. 3100–2900 B.C.
Iran or Mesopotamia
Copper alloy; H. 6 7/8 in. (17.5 cm); W. 2 1/8 in. (5.4 cm)
Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2007 (2007.280)

This solid-cast sculpture in the **lost-wax** method is an extraordinary example of the ability to convey power and monumentality on a small scale at the dawn of metal sculpture. It is one of a pair (the other is on display at the Brooklyn Museum) of nearly identical images of an energetic figure wearing the upturned boots associated with the highland regions of Iran and Mesopotamia. His power is enhanced by the horns of the ibex on his head and the body and wings of a bird of prey draped around his shoulders. Striking is the stress on the muscles of the arms, pectorals, and legs. He steps forward on the left foot with fists clenched, arms bent, and right fist extended forward, all contributing to a sense of aggressive movement.

While images of horned figures are generally associated with highland areas of the ancient Near East, the volumes of this sculpture are naturalistic, typical of the lowland, urban areas of southern Mesopotamia and southwestern Iran. He thus seems to embody two traditions at once. He may represent a **shaman**, a holy man with spiritual and magical abilities. His distinctive dress and animal attributes were perhaps meant to reflect the shaman's transformation of himself in order to harness the forces of nature and the power of animals for use in magic and healing (see "Religion, Magic, and Medicine," p. 42). Such a blending of human and animal forms to visualize the supernatural world is especially characteristic of the contemporary arts of Proto-Elamite Iran.

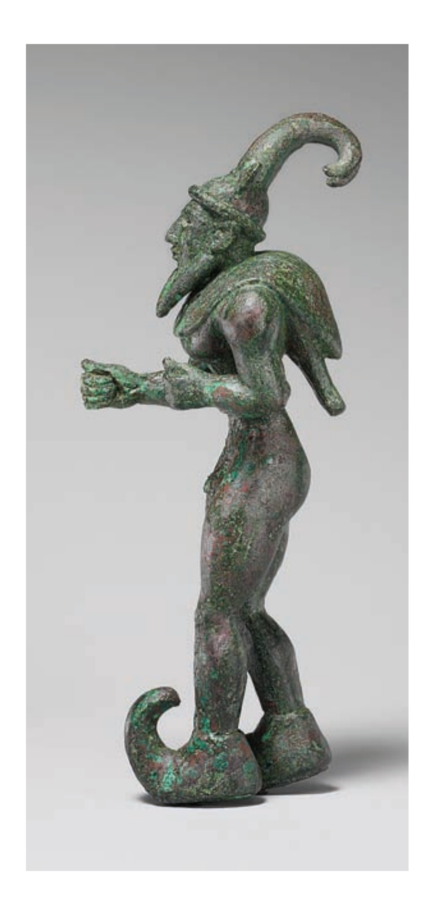
Small-scale sculptures were often intentionally buried in sacred spaces during the early third millennium B.C. As this figure was one of a pair, both of which have **tangs** at the base of their feet (not visible in these photographs), it is likely that they were attached to another element, possibly to flank other components in a larger composition. However, because neither this piece nor its mate come from archaeological excavations, it is not entirely clear how such figures would have been used and where they might have been deposited.

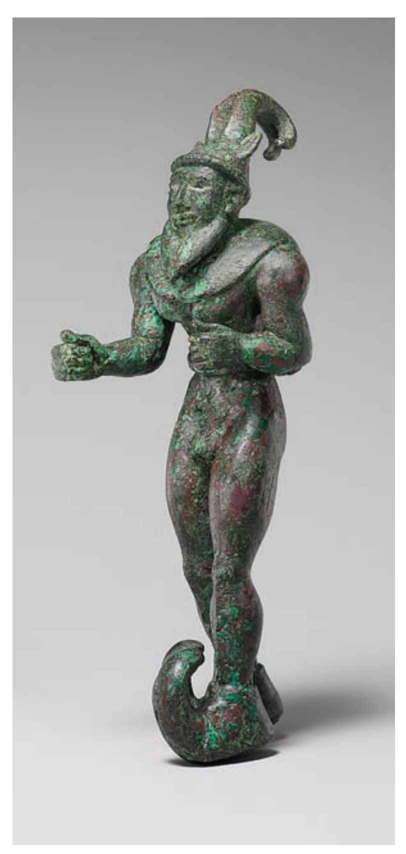
QUESTIONS

- What do you first notice about this figure?
- What in this figure creates a sense of power and energy? How is this expressed? Consider pose, clothing, and scale. What kind of being do you think this might be? Experts are uncertain what this figure represents. Discuss the reasons why its exact meaning and function are a mystery.

COMPARE image 3. Which aspects of these figures are human and which are animal? How are these aspects combined in both objects?

COMPARE image 5, noting differences in style and pose.







3 Kneeling Bull Holding a Spouted Vessel

Proto-Elamite period, ca. 3100–2900 B.C.
Iran
Silver; H. 6 3/8 in. (16.3 cm)
Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1966 (66.173)

Early Elamite craftspeople often portrayed animals that are partly human or appear to be doing human things. This silver bull kneels, wears human clothes, and holds up a vase with its hooves for a ritual offering. The head, neck, and hooves are bovine while the shoulders, arms, and pose of the body are human. The long robe with geometric patterns **chased** into the surface adds richness to the overall design and also hides awkward transitions between the animal and human forms that might otherwise be visible. This elaborate decorative patterning is also typical of the Elamite style.

The meaning of these curious human-animal combinations is obscure to us today, but they certainly held particular meaning for the people living in the mountains of southwestern Iran and in the lowlands of Sumer at the turn of the third millennium B.C. These creatures may have been symbols of natural forces but just as likely could be protagonists in myths or fables that are now lost. Clearly the bull's pose refers to the performance of an important ritual. Traces of cloth that were found affixed to the figure suggest that it was intentionally buried, perhaps as part of a ritual or ceremony.

The hollow figure was constructed from at least fifteen pieces of silver that were hammered into the appropriate shapes and then joined together with silver solder. Because it contains several pebbles inside its hollow body, the object may have served as a noisemaker. The bull fits comfortably into one's hand and does not sit easily by itself on a flat surface. This reinforces the idea that it was meant for active use in ritual performance, including the creation of sound.

QUESTIONS

- What features of this figure are animal and what features are human? What type of animal is this?
- What do its pose and expression suggest? What is it doing?
- This object was made of silver and has small pebbles inside. What sound do you imagine this vessel might make when it is shaken? How does that change the way you see it? Discuss how this object might have been used.

COMPARE image 2, noting how dress and pose signal human and animal characteristics.

COMPARE with images 17, 25, and 27, which were all used as vessels. In contrast, this bull holds a vessel but had a different function. Compare the integration of animal and vessel forms in all of these.



(shown actual size)

4 Proto-Cuneiform Tablet with Seal Impressions

Jemdet Nasr period, ca. 3100–2900 B.C.
Mesopotamia
Clay; H. 2 ⅛ in. (5.5 cm); W. 2 ⅜ in. (6 cm); thickness 1 ⅝ in. (4.2 cm)
Purchase, Raymond and Beverly Sackler Gift, 1988 (1988.433.1)

Of the many legacies left by the ancient civilizations of southern Mesopotamia, the invention of writing is paramount. At the end of the fourth millennium B.C., written language developed in the region, first as **pictographs** and then evolving into abstract forms called **cuneiform**. The pictographs, like the ones on this tablet, are called proto-cuneiform and were drawn in the clay with a pointed implement. Circular impressions alongside the pictographs represented numerical symbols. Cuneiform (meaning wedge-shaped) script was written by pressing a reed pen or stylus with a wedge-shaped tip into a clay tablet. Clay, when dried to a somewhat hardened state, made a fine surface for writing, and when fired the records written on it became permanent.

Early writing was used primarily as a means of recording and storing economic information. This tablet most likely documents grain distributed by a large temple, although the absence of verbs in early texts makes them difficult to interpret with certainty. In addition to the writing that appears on this tablet, the imagery of the cylinder seal, which was incompletely impressed on both faces and the edges of the tablet before it was inscribed, also records information. This seal apparently has not survived. The seal impression depicts a male figure guiding two dogs on a leash and hunting or herding boars in a reed marsh (FIG. 24). He is the so-called priest-king, a male figure who can be identified by his dress and pose. Here he appears in his role as the good shepherd who protects flocks from wild predators.

QUESTIONS

- What are the different ways in which this tablet was marked? What did the scribe use to write these early pictographs in the clay surface of the tablet?
- Compare the shapes of the images impressed by the cylinder seal with those of the pictographs. Which came first, the impression of the cylinder seal or the incised lines? What images do we see impressed by the cylinder seal? Discuss modern pictographs as methods of communication (consider emoticons and logos).

COMPARE image 13. The seals that were impressed on images 4 and 13 no longer survive. Imagine how a seal (such as image 8) would have created impressions such as these.

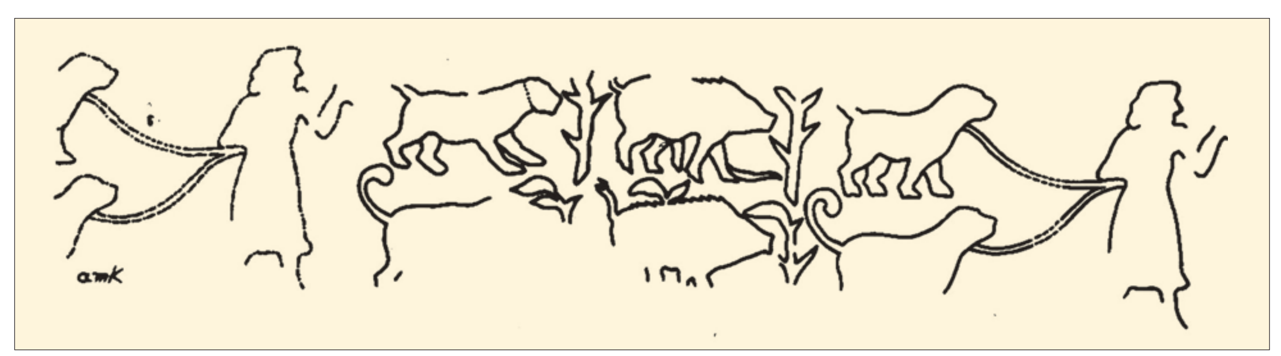


FIGURE 24
Line drawing showing the seal impression on this tablet. Illustration by Abdallah Kahil





5 Standing Male Figure

Early Dynastic I–II period, ca. 2900–2600 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Eshnunna (modern Tell Asmar)
Gypsum, shell, black limestone, and bitumen; H. 11 ⅝ in. (29.5 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1940 (40.156)

In the ancient Near East, the common person's relationship to gods and goddesses was distant and formal. Deities were believed to inhabit **cult statues** housed in temples, and contact with them could only be achieved through **votive** offerings and the elaborate rituals of an intermediary priest. During the Early Dynastic period a special type of votive sculpture like this male figure became popular for this purpose.

This figure, with clasped hands and wide-eyed staring gaze, was found ritually buried along with eleven others in a temple. All twelve are thought to originally have been set up as representations of worshippers in perpetual prayer before their deity. His large head has prominent eyes inlaid with shell and black limestone; a continuous arching brow incised across the forehead was also inlaid, perhaps with **bitumen**. Stylized tresses fall on either side of a rectangular beard and both hair and beard show traces of the bitumen that originally coated them. The figure is bare-chested and wears a skirt with a single row of long fringe at the bottom.

A composite of geometric volumes, the figure illustrates an abstract style of sculpture. Except for the figure's beard and the vertical lines of the robe, details have been eliminated and the body has been conceived as a conical shape from which angular arms project. Their triangular forms are repeated in the shape of the nose and in the patterns of the beard. This abstract sculptural style existed alongside a more realistic one during this period, likely indicating that this sculpture's form was a purposeful choice rather than lack of ability on the part of the craftsperson.

QUESTIONS

- What features stand out? Why? What does this figure's pose suggest? And his expression?
- How would you describe the form of the figure? What shapes are repeated? Discuss the function of figures like this.

COMPARE image 10, noting facial expression, pose, details of dress, and artistic style.



6 Vessel Stand with Ibex Support

Early Dynastic III period, ca. 2600–2350 B.C.
Mesopotamia
Copper alloy, inlaid with shell and lapis lazuli; H. 15 ¾ in. (40 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1974 (1974.190)

Temple rituals in the ancient Near East often involved making offerings of food, drink, and incense to the deities. This **copper alloy** stand was probably part of the ritual furniture in a Sumerian temple and placed in the sanctuary before the **cult statue** of the deity. Rising from the ibex's back are supports that form four rings, which may have held cylindrical vessels that were used to make such ritual offerings. Curved struts on each side of the base may have supported additional vessels.

Although the animal's anatomy has been simplified into smooth rounded shapes, it is rendered naturalistically. The ridged, backward-curving horns and the tufts below the muzzle and behind the fetlocks identify the animal as an ibex, a wild goat whose habitat was in the mountains to the east and north of Sumer. With cocked ears and wide eyes inlaid in contrasting materials, the ibex appears to stand at attention. The pose is stationary and frontal.

This copper alloy stand is one of the earliest examples of **lost-wax casting**. It was cast in four sections—the animal's head, its body, the base, and superstructure—that were then joined together. The superstructure, base, and head of the ibex are solid cast while its body is hollow cast.

QUESTIONS

- What type of animal is this? How would you describe its anatomy, pose, and expression?
- Consider the valuable materials and process used to make this stand. Note its size. Think about the context in which it would have been used as ritual furniture. What might it have held to fulfill its ritual purpose?
- Imagine how elements that do not survive archaeologically (water, incense, music, movement) might enhance your understanding of how the object functioned.

COMPARE with images 1 and 24, noting the similarities and differences in the depictions of ibex.



7

Headdress

Early Dynastic IIIa period, ca. 2600–2500 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Ur (modern Tell al-Muqayyar)
Gold, lapis lazuli, carnelian; L. 15 ⅛ in. (38.5 cm)
Dodge Fund, 1933 (33.35.3)

This piece of jewelry is made of thin hammered leaves of gold and beads of lapis lazuli and carnelian. Archaeologists found it around the forehead of a female who was also adorned with gold hair ribbons, two silver hair rings, and two gold necklaces (**FIG. 25**). She was buried in one of the richest tombs in the so-called Royal Cemetery at Ur, a site that revealed close to two thousand burials. Among these were sixteen especially rich tombs. Most of these tombs contained a primary occupant accompanied by varying numbers of sacrificed attendants, all of whom were elaborately and similarly adorned. This headdress belonged to such an attendant. Because the scenario at Ur is unprecedented for the ancient Near East, we do not fully understand who the primary occupants of these tombs were. However, the lavish amount of precious jewelry found at Ur combined with the element of sacrifice indicates that those buried there were people of the highest importance in their society, such as royalty or individuals connected to religious institutions.

In ancient texts, jewelry is mentioned as royal gifts, as tribute and booty, and as part of royal dowries. It is often associated with divine and funerary contexts. Very few pieces, however, have been recovered by archaeologists. The major exception is the large amount of jewelry discovered at Ur. The repetitive and primarily vegetal designs likely had symbolic meaning while the gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and carnelian were believed to be charged with magic properties. The presence of these precious materials also indicates extensive international trade since these materials were not available in Mesopotamia. Lapis lazuli came from northern Afghanistan, carnelian from India, and gold and silver from Egypt, Anatolia, and areas east of Mesopotamia.

QUESTIONS

- Of what materials do you think this is made? What type of person might have had something of this value?
- Discuss the burials at Ur. What does the jewelry suggest about the status of those buried in the tombs? And about their contacts with other cultures? In what ways can jewelry serve to reflect and transform identity?

COMPARE image 28, noting indicators of the deceased's social and economic status; image 2 and 16, considering the transformative power of dress and adornment.



FIGURE 25
Headdress and other jewelry on a crushed skull as found in the burials excavated at Ur (modern Tell al-Muqayyar). Photograph by Max Hirmer



8 Cylinder Seal and Modern Impression: Hunting Scene

Late Akkadian period, ca. 2200–2100 B.C.
Mesopotamia
Chert; H. 1 1/8 in. (2.8 cm)
Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941 (41.160.192)

In ancient Mesopotamia, a cylinder-shaped seal could be rolled on a variety of objects made of clay. When seals were impressed on tablets or tablet cases the seal impressions served to identify the authority responsible for what was written in the documents, much as a signature does today. When seals were impressed on sealings—lumps of clay that were used to secure doors and the lids of storage jars (FIG. 26)—the seal impressions served to identify their owner and protect against unauthorized opening. Many cylinder seals have survived because they were made of durable materials, particularly stone, but also metal and fired clay. Perforated through the middle like a bead, seals were also believed to have **apotropaic**, or protective, functions and were worn as jewelry or pinned on garments.

The modern impression of a seal is shown here so that the entire design can be seen. The scene is composed of two basic groupings that form an overall continuous design unified by the stylized landscape setting. In one group, two tall trees flank a hunter grasping an ibex. Above the man a **cuneiform** inscription gives the name of the seal owner, Balu-ili, who was a court official, and his profession, cupbearer. In the other group, ibexes stand on mountains, facing each other and flanking three trees. This seal was made during the Akkadian period, when the **iconography** used by the seal engraver expanded to include a variety of new mythological, thematic, and narrative subjects. Here, the already ancient motif of the hunt is given a new setting in a clearly defined landscape. If there was a relationship between this imagery and the inscribed text, its meaning is no longer understood.

Sacred and secular ideas, fundamental to the beliefs of ancient Mesopotamian peoples, were visualized in the miniature images carved on the seals. The carver used **intaglio**, a technique in which the forms were cut into the stone, to create the raised impression. The challenge of the seal carver was to create a design that would maintain its balance and clarity when rolled out only half its length on a small surface or twice its length on a larger surface. On the left and right edges of the impression one can see how the rolled out design begins to repeat. Unlike much of the art of the ancient Near East, which survives only in a fragmentary state, cylinder seals are in the unique position of appearing almost exactly as they would have looked to the ancient people who used them.

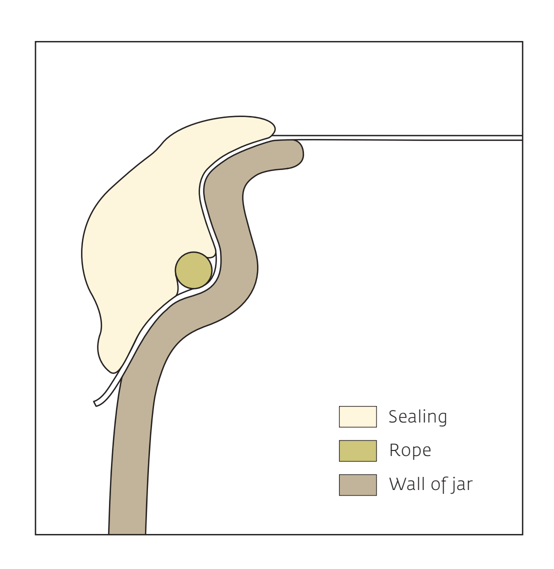
QUESTIONS

- Discuss the various functions of cylinder seals.
- Why are the images cut into the surface instead of cutting away the background as in relief sculpture?
- What themes are expressed in the imagery of this seal? What elements help you identify these themes? Look closely at the rollout of the seal and find the inscription that gives the name and profession of the owner.
- How might you wear this seal if you were the owner?

COMPARE with images 4 and 13, noting the ancient seal impressions they bear.

COMPARE image 30, noting the way in which the hunting scene is designed. How is this different from the way the action unfolds here?





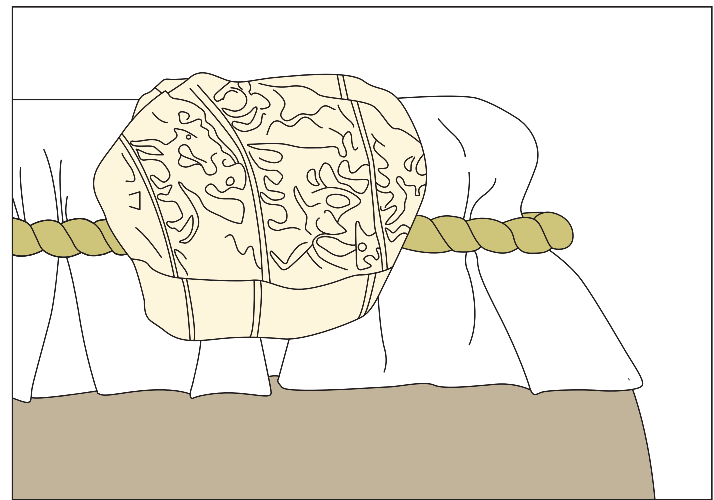


FIGURE 26

Diagrams showing a sealed container (cross-section at left). Illustration after that by Denise L. Hoffman and Michelle I. Marcus

9 Foundation Peg in the Form of the Forepart of a Lion

Early Bronze Age, ca. 2200–2100 B.C.
Syria, probably from Urkesh (modern Tell Mozan)
Copper alloy; H. 4 5⁄8 in. (11.7 cm)
Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1948 (48.180)

This foundation peg in the form of a snarling lion probably comes from northeastern Syria. Its forelegs are outstretched over an inscribed plaque composed in the Hurrian language and written in **cuneiform** that names "Tishatal, endan [ruler] of Urkesh." Urkesh, modern Tell Mozan, is one of the only major Hurrian cities to have been explored archaeologically, but has produced few examples of Hurrian art. Thus it remains very difficult to definitively assign objects to the Hurrian cultural sphere unless they are inscribed in the Hurrian language (see "Cuneiform Messages," pp. 27–29). Traditionally, during the construction of Sumerian temples, pegs of various forms were placed in foundation deposits as a dedication to the god. The adoption and continuation of this practice, which originated in southern Mesopotamia, by a ruler in the north suggests that the Hurrian rulers of Urkesh were in close contact with the Akkadian Empire to the south at this time.

The image of the lion as a guardian animal is prominent throughout the history of Mesopotamia and the surrounding regions. Here, the upper half of the lion's body is portrayed realistically. With claws unsheathed and ears and whiskers laid back, the lion turns toward a potential threat, lifts its head, bares its teeth, and roars. It roars to frighten off the enemy and protect the temple pegs from displacement, thereby assuring the integrity of the temple. The inscription on the plaque held by the lion was intended to preserve the name of the builder and to guarantee not only the stability but the timelessness of the temple. Below the plaque the body of the lion, so realistic and forceful from the chest up, turns into the shape of a peg.

QUESTIONS

- Why does the upper part of this lion's body look so fierce? Notice how it turns toward us. What is the figure doing?
- Discuss the function of this piece. How does knowing the function affect your understanding of what is happening?
- Consider the placement of the plaque under the lion's paws. What does this convey about the role of this lion figure in the action described on the plaque?

COMPARE with images 20 and 23, looking at the depictions of lions and leonine creatures and comparing their protective functions.



10 Statue of Gudea

Neo-Sumerian period, reign of Gudea, ca. 2090 B.C.
Mesopotamia, probably from Girsu (modern Tello)
Diorite; H. 17 3⁄8 in. (44 cm)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1959 (59.2)

Gudea ruled the Sumerian city-state of Lagash that encompassed the ancient city of Girsu, where this sculpture was probably found. He is portrayed here sitting on a low chair in a frontal pose and wearing a wide brimmed royal hat decorated with spirals of lamb's wool. On his robe vertical columns of **cuneiform** state: "Let the life of Gudea, who built the house, be long." The statue was likely set up in a temple where its inscription would have served as a direct plea to deities. The serious expression on the face and the folded hands create a feeling of piety and calm perfectly suited to the statue's function, which was to represent the ruler in perpetuity before the deities of Lagash.

Despite its relatively small size, this figure seems massive because its form, although smoothed and rounded, retains the block-like shape of the stone. The modeling of the stone around the nose, mouth, exposed shoulder and arm, and feet is naturally rendered. In contrast, the head, the eyes with pronounced eyelids, and the thick, patterned eyebrows were enlarged and stylized to make them more expressive. The strongly emphasized musculature of Gudea's bare right arm and shoulder should probably be read as a reference to the strength of his rule and his legitimacy as a governor. The representation of these somewhat exaggerated features was not a record of his actual appearance but rather the embodiment of qualities associated with good leadership, such as strength, wisdom, and piety (see "The Royal Image," pp. 34–38).

A rich play of light and shadow is created by the highly polished surface of the diorite, a very hard and costly stone that was imported from the mountains of Magan (probably the region of modern Oman). The considerable expense required to obtain and transport such stones as well as the difficulty of sculpting hard-wearing minerals presumably added to their prestige value. The durable nature of the stone also would have appealed to a ruler's desire for his image to last for many generations.

QUESTIONS

- Notice this figure's pose and expression and the way he holds his hands. What does this suggest?
- Why are some of the forms of his body exaggerated? To which of his characteristics did this ruler want to draw attention?
- Discuss the cuneiform inscription on his robe. Where was the statue originally placed? What was its function?

COMPARE image 5, noting pose, expression, and style. In spite of differences, how do they convey similar ideas of religious piety?



11 Head of a Ruler

Early Bronze Age, ca. 2300–2000 B.C.
Iran or Mesopotamia
Copper alloy; H. 13 ½ in. (34.3 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1947 (47.100.80)

The identity of this lifesize head and where it was created remain a mystery. The expert craftsmanship and innovative technology involved in shaping it and casting it in **copper alloy**, a very costly material, indicates that it represents a king or elite person. The nose, lips, large ears, heavy-lidded eyes, and modeling of the face are rendered in a naturalistic style. The dark, empty spaces of the eyes were probably originally inlaid with contrasting materials. Patterns in the elegantly coiffed beard and well-trimmed mustache and the curving and diagonal lines of the figure's cloth turban can still be seen beneath the corroded copper surface. These aspects of personal appearance further support the identification of this image with an elite personage (see "The Royal Image," pp. 34–38). Furthermore, the head's unusually individualized features suggest that it might be a portrait. Were that to be true, the head would be a rare example of portraiture in ancient Near Eastern art.

Recent examination has revealed that the head, long thought to be virtually solid, originally contained a clay core held in place by metal supports. It may be among the earliest known examples of lifesize hollow casting in the **lost-wax** method. A plate across the neck incorporates a square peg originally set into a body or other mount, which may have been made of a different material.

QUESTIONS

- Imagine this copper alloy head when it was new. Instead of a rough, green surface, it would have been a golden brown color and the eyes would have been inlaid with light and dark stone.
- What type of person might this depict? What do his features and attitude suggest?
- Notice the set of the mouth, the heavy lidded eyes, and the large ears. Does this suggest that the sculpture portrays an actual ruler, an ideal image, or both?

COMPARE with images 10 and 29, considering the degrees of realism and idealization.



12 Shaft-Hole Axe

Bronze Age, ca. 2000 B.C.
Bactria-Margiana (Central Asia)
Silver and gold foil; L. 5 7/8 in. (15 cm)
Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, and James N. Spear and Schimmel Foundation Inc. Gifts, 1982 (1982.5)

This silver shaft-hole axe is a masterpiece of sculpture partly in the round and partly in relief. Expertly cast in silver and gilded with gold foil, it portrays the lively struggle of a bird-like creature with a boar and a dragon. The main figure appears to have two heads because the battle is depicted on both sides of the axe. His muscular body is human except for his bird head and the bird talons that replace his hands and feet. The posture of the boar is contorted so that its bristly back forms the shape of the blade. The dragon, shown in the round, has folded and staggered wings, a feline body, and the talons of a bird of prey replacing its front paws. Its single horn is now broken and gone. The base of the axe is finished by a series of small silver wire loops inserted into holes that perhaps imitate leather strips.

The precious materials used to make this weapon indicate that it served a ceremonial purpose rather than a practical function. Ceremonial weapons with powerful images on them were sometimes worshipped as objects containing divine powers. Remains of wood preserved inside the socket hole of the axe show that it was originally mounted on a shaft.

The form of the axe as well as the stylistic and iconographic details such as the winged dragon and the combination of two metals to enhance the design identify it as a product of the culture of ancient Bactria-Margiana. Today this area includes part of northern Afghanistan and southern Turkmenistan. During the late third and early second millennia B.C., a prosperous urban culture flourished in this region, supported in part by a lively trade in both luxury and utilitarian commodities with the civilizations to the west, in Iran, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia.

QUESTIONS

- What is happening in this scene? Its original meaning is unclear. What might the figures represent? The main figure appears to have two heads because the scene is repeated on the other side.
- How might the scene relate to the function of the object? Was this axe head created to use in battle or in ceremonies? What materials did the craftsperson use?

COMPARE image 16, noting the depiction of animals on ceremonial war regalia.

COMPARE with images 14, 20, and 22, noting the different ways in which composite creatures can be constructed.



13 Cuneiform Tablet and Case with Seal Impressions

Old Assyrian Trading Colony period, ca. 1950–1836 B.C.
Anatolia, probably from Kanesh (modern Kültepe)
Clay; tablet: H. 6 ⅝ in. (16.9 cm); W. 2 ⅞ in. (7.3 cm);
case: H. 7 ¼ in. (18.5 cm); W. 3 ½ in. (9 cm)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Klejman, 1966 (66.245.5a, b)

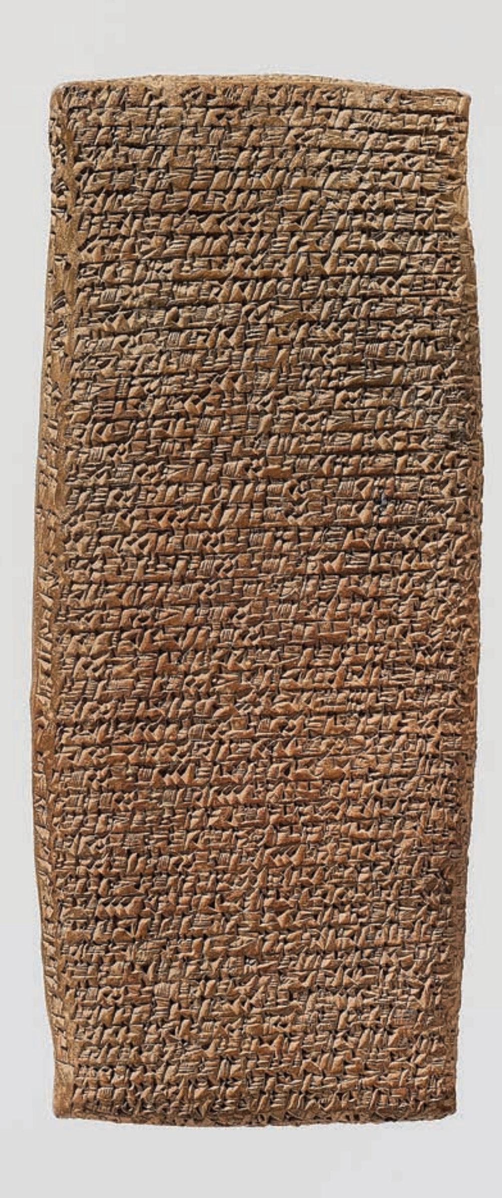
Kültepe, the ancient city of Kanesh, was one of a network of trading settlements established in central Anatolia by Assyrian merchants from northern Mesopotamia in the early second millennium B.C. These merchants traded vast quantities of goods, primarily tin and textiles, for Anatolian copper and other materials. In order to record transactions, they brought their tools of administration: **cuneiform** writing, tablets encased in clay envelopes, and cylinder seals. At Kültepe the remains of archives that comprised thousands of texts documenting the activities of these Assyrian merchants provide a glimpse into the complex and sophisticated commercial interactions that took place in the Near East during the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

These two clay objects represent one such document and its envelope. The tablet records court testimony describing an ownership dispute. In the cuneiform text, which would have been read from left to right, two merchants accuse each other of stealing valuables, including business documents. However, the verdict of the court is unknown. The case is sealed with two different cylinder seals belonging to the two witnesses to the deposition, rolled across the front, back, and sides. Both seal impressions show scenes in which worshippers approach a larger seated figure, probably a divinity, holding a cup. While the use of the cylinder seal, rather than the stamp seal, was typically Mesopotamian, the seal carving was a visual hybrid that mixed elements such as the procession to a seated deity, a Mesopotamian motif, and an Anatolian style that emphasized features such as the large eyes of the figures, in a manner that offers further evidence for the cultural interaction between the two areas.

QUESTIONS

- Consider the skill and patience the scribe needed to make such tiny, neat rows of cuneiform.
- What does the tablet record? What evidence do we have that witnesses were present at this event?
- Cuneiform was an ancient script rather than a culture-specific language. Why would the use of cuneiform have made intercultural communication more efficient?
- Discuss similarities and differences between our writing and cuneiform. Consider tools, materials, and form.

COMPARE with images 4 and 8, which show other examples of writing and seal use.




14 Furniture Support

Old Assyrian Trading Colony period, ca. 1800–1700 B.C.
Anatolia, probably from Acemhöyük
Ivory (hippopotamus), gold leaf;
H. 5 in. (12.7 cm); W. 4 ⅛ in. (10.4 cm)
Gift of George D. Pratt, 1932 (32.161.46)

This small furniture element is one of four supports (FIG. 27). These supports were made of hippopotamus teeth formed into compact seated sphinxes. Positioned together they would have supported a small piece of furniture that could not have held much weight. Ivory, a smooth and easily carved material, was fashioned into plaques and supports used in luxurious chairs, tables, and beds suitable for elites and royalty.

The body of the sphinx is leonine in form. The human head has large almond-shaped eyes and spiral locks that ultimately derive from the Egyptian goddess Hathor. The sphinx, a creature whose composite human and animal form symbolizes its supernatural power, was also Egyptian in origin. While the imagery is Egyptian, the carving with its fleshy forms is Anatolian in style. The appearance of Egyptian motifs and features in the arts of Anatolia is evidence of cultural interaction in the second millennium B.C. Such exchanges were the result of trade and travel between the peoples of the ancient Near East. These furniture supports are thought to have come from one of the merchant colonies in central Anatolia established by Assyrian traders from northern Mesopotamia during the first two centuries of the second millennium B.C. (see image 13).

The red and pink color may be the accidental result of long contact with the soil, though ancient texts do describe ivories that were deliberately stained. While gold foil may have been applied to only certain details, the random traces of gold that appear on the surface of these and other ivories suggest they may have been entirely sheathed in the precious material.

QUESTIONS

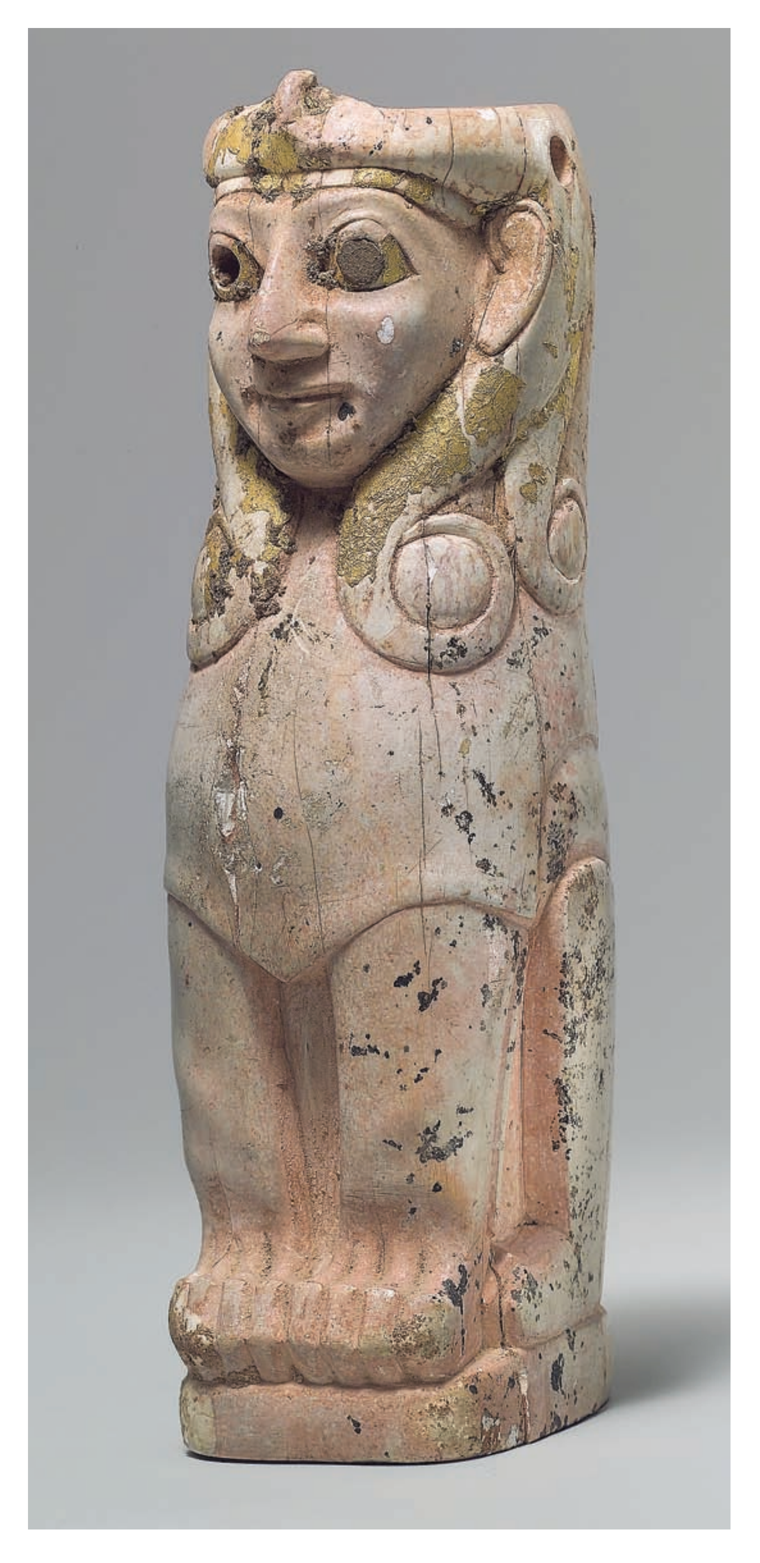
- What composite creature does this small figure represent? Where did this particular combined human-animal form originate and how could it have reached the area where it was made?
- Considering their small size and peg-like shapes, what could their function have been? Of what type of furniture do you imagine this might have been a part? Why?
- Discuss elephant and hippopotamus ivories. Why were objects made of ivory considered to be such luxuries? How might they have looked originally and how does this differ from our modern ideas about how to use luxury materials?

COMPARE image 22, noting differences in the depiction of sphinxes and the function of the objects.

COMPARE with images 16 and 18, considering the role of gold in the creation of a sense of divine radiance.



FIGURE 27
Set of ivory furniture supports positioned to show possible original placement; image 14 shown at top center



15 Pendants and Beads

Old Babylonian period, ca. 1800–1600 B.C.
Mesopotamia, said to be from Dilbat
Gold; D. of largest medallion 1 3/8 in. (3.6 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1947 (47.1a2, .1a4 –.1a9, .1a11, .1a12, 1b–i)

These gold ornaments are among the most important examples of ancient gold work from Mesopotamia. The pendants and beads were supposedly found at Dilbat, a site south of Babylon. While the arrangement as a necklace appears complete, it is a modern reconstruction that may not reflect its ancient reality. Based on the range of styles, varied alloys of gold, and differing levels of craftsmanship evident in the group, the assemblage should probably be seen as a hoard of individual elements rather than as a coherent necklace.

Five of the pendants represent the emblematic forms of major Mesopotamian deities: the large disk with ray-like designs is Shamash, the sun god; the crescent is Sin, the moon god; the lightning fork is Adad, the storm god; and the two rosettes symbolize Ishtar, the goddess of sexual love and of war (see "Communicating with the Divine," pp. 39–42). The two small females in flounced dresses correspond to protective deities called *lama* goddesses. Divine symbols have a long tradition in the art of the ancient Near East. The rosette, for instance, can be traced back to the fourth millennium B.C., while the sun disk, the crescent, the lightning fork, and the females in flounced dresses first appeared in the latter half of the third millennium B.C.

These pendants provided **apotropaic** protection. Even more than that, the gods or goddesses represented by the symbols on the pendants were believed to be magically present in the forms themselves. The presence of deities in these gold emblems was as powerful as that of the actual living god believed to dwell in a **cult statue**. Perhaps that is why certain jewels were banned along with **idol** worship in many later religions that arose in the ancient Near East.

QUESTIONS

- What shapes and images do you see in these gold pendants? Discuss who and/or what they each stand for, and explore the relationship between the form of the symbol and the deity. Why would a person want to wear one or more of these symbols? Discuss the belief that the gods were thought to be magically present in these emblems.

COMPARE image 16, discussing the incorporation of divine, protective symbols in personal adornment. What does the array of symbols tell us about the cultures' concerns? Can you think of current world religions or practices that incorporate symbols of protection and identity in personal wear? (e.g. cross, *chai*, amulets, saints' medals, peace sign, hand of Fatima, Buddha, etc.) Discuss the similarities and differences between the wearing of these gold emblems, which embody the deity, and that of modern emblems of religious or spiritual identity.



16 Helmet with Divine Figures

Middle Elamite period, ca. 1500–1100 B.C.
Iran
Bronze, gold foil over bitumen; H. 6 ½ in (16.5 cm); W. 8 ¾ in. (22.1 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1963 (63.74)

This bronze helmet, elaborately ornamented with precious material and equipped with a tapering metal tube at the back for the insertion of a feather or a horsehair plume, might have been worn by a military person of high rank. It is decorated with three divine figures. The central figure is a bearded god who holds a vase from which streams of water flow. The pattern covering the god's skirt is an artistic convention used to indicate mountains. The god, perhaps analogous to the Sumerian god of sweet water, Ea, is flanked by two female deities with horned crowns who hold up their hands in supplication. They wear flounced dresses, traditional garb for goddesses in Mesopotamia during the third and second millennia B.C. The gilding of the figures would also have indicated their divine nature. The presence of Mesopotamian images in Elamite art suggests that religious **iconography** spread as part of the intense interaction among ancient Near Eastern cultures during the second millennium B.C.

A bird with outstretched wings crowns the helmet and swoops over all three figures. Its pose effectively conveys the impression of strength, even invincibility, although it is not known what the bird was specifically intended to represent. It may have been a divinity of the skies, a complement to the power expressed by the figures below, or simply a bird of prey ready to attack the wearer's opponents. Either way, the combined images on this helmet would certainly have assured the wearer of divine protection and would have also provided an air of distinction.

The figural elements were carved from air-hardened **bitumen**, after which they would have been covered in gold foil, and then heated slightly to allow them to adhere to the helmet. Such fragile materials would be vulnerable to breakage in battle or melting under the heat of the sun, which suggests the helmet was worn only on ceremonial occasions.

QUESTIONS

- How would you know that three of the four beings on this bronze helmet are gods and goddesses? Why do you think the fourth one seems to have supernatural powers as well? What might it have meant to the owner to have these figures adorn his helmet?
- Discuss what bitumen is. (See also "Materials and Techniques," pp. 48–49)

COMPARE image 12. Discuss elements of ceremonial war regalia.



17 Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Stag

Hittite Empire period, ca. 1400–1200 B.C.
Anatolia
Silver, gold inlay; H. 7 1/8 in. (18 cm)
Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989 (1989.281.10)

Drinking cups terminating in the forepart of an animal are a very ancient form of vessel in the Near East. This fully antlered stag is beautifully rendered with a naturalism that is characteristic of Hittite art. Although alert, it rests with its tucked forelegs projecting slightly to balance the base of the cup. The head and upper body are treated with extraordinary detail and sensitivity. The oval eyes—originally inlaid—are now hollow and are connected to prominent tear ducts. The nostrils are in high relief and the small mouth is indicated by an incised line. Veins are shown in relief on the face, and the cheek and jaw are articulated with ridges. The antlers, ears, and curved handle on the other side of the cup were made of tubes of curved metal inserted in holes and soldered in place. The body of the vessel was hammered into shape from at least a dozen separate silver sheets. The checkered collar around the stag's neck reinforces the join between the head and body. The entire object forms the shell of one continuous hollow space. However, it suffered damage in antiquity, and the foremost section—the stag's head, above the collar—may have originally been blocked off by filling with **bitumen**, as is the case with some ancient vessels similar to this one.

Around the rim of the vessel a relief in **repoussé** depicts figures in a ritual or religious ceremony, probably celebrating a successful hunt (FIG. 28). The narrative begins with the figure of a dead stag positioned against a tree with a quiver for arrows, a bag, and two spears nearby. On the other side of the spears, a deity wearing a pointed, horned headdress sits upon a throne and holds a cup and a bird. Hittite **hieroglyphs** inlaid in gold name the god; however, scholars disagree on how to read this particular god's name. In front of the deity are a brazier and a god standing on a stag holding a bird and a staff. Facing these two deities are three male worshippers. The first one, possibly a ruler, pours a libation, the second carries what appears to be bread, and the third holds a spouted vessel. They are dressed alike and wear pointed shoes with curled toes, as does the god standing on the stag.

Hittite texts record inventories of objects used in ritual practice that include zoomorphic vessels such as this one. Animal-headed vessels also appear among the myriad of items listed in the second-millennium B.C. texts known as the **Amarna Letters**, which reveal that such luxury items were exchanged as diplomatic gifts between powerful Late Bronze Age rulers (see "A Brief History of the Ancient Near East," p. 23).

QUESTIONS

- Look carefully at the stag's head and forepart. What details can you see that would also appear on such an animal in life?
- Imagine the cup filled with liquid. How would you hold it in such a state? What type of liquid do you think it might have held? In what context do you think it might have been used?
- Discuss the possible interpretations of the narrative that encircles the rim of the cup and the writing outlined in gold.
- Consider this item in the context of diplomatic exchange and how this tradition continues today.

COMPARE with images 25 and 27, noting the integration of animal and vessel forms.



FIGURE 28
Line drawing of the scene in relief. Illustration by C. Koken

18 Enthroned Deity

Late Bronze Age, ca. 1400–1200 B.C.
Levant
Bronze, gold foil; H. 5 in. (12.7 cm)
Gift of George D. Pratt, 1932 (32.161.45)

This small seated figure would have originally sat on a separately made chair or stool. A **tang** at the feet and another at the buttocks would have held it in place. He wears a long gown and a conical hat with a small knob at the top. His large eyes may once have held inlays of another material. One arm is missing but both would have been bent from the elbow, with hands most likely held forward in a peaceful gesture. The bronze body is covered with a fairly thick layer of gold foil, which would have protected the underlying material from weathering, added to his radiant appearance, and indicated his divine nature. The seated pose, enlarged features, hat shape, and gold foil overlay ultimately all identify him as a deity (see "Communicating with the Divine," pp. 39–42). The figure may have had a ritual purpose as a **votive** or **cult statue**.

During the second millennium B.C. in the Levant, small statues of Canaanite gods were produced that incorporated elements from a variety of cultures. The conical hat worn by many of the seated figures may reflect Egyptian inspiration, although it had become a defining feature of the local style by the time it was used in this period. Many of the male figures produced in this tradition take one of two forms: either that of a benevolent, mature deity like this one, or that of a youthful deity raising a weapon in his right hand (**FIG. 29**). The latter was called a "smiting god" because his dynamic stance derives from Egyptian images of kings triumphing over fallen enemies, another motif borrowed from Egypt and transformed within a Canaanite context. These warlike deities probably represent the young Canaanite storm god Baal, while the seated gods, like this one, likely represent El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon. Both were the subject of widespread worship in the Levant during the later second millennium B.C.

While this small figure appears unremarkable today, images of this type aroused great passions in the period when monotheistic worship first developed in the Levant. Because of the millennia-long belief that such objects could embody the essence and power of the deities they depicted, these images presented a challenge to new religious ideas that classified them as pagan gods. The idols destroyed by the early Jewish patriarchs, who may have lived in the early Iron Age, were created in the same Canaanite cultural context as this piece, and perhaps took similar forms.

QUESTIONS

- Look closely at this small Canaanite figure. What clues suggest that it represents a deity? Consider pose, attire, and material. Discuss the aesthetic qualities of gold as a material. How might these qualities reflect characteristics of the divine?

COMPARE image 5, discussing which features of each of these figures suggest their respective roles.



FIGURE 29
Statue of the storm god Baal. Syria, excavated at Minet el-Beidha, Late Bronze Age, ca. 1600–1200 B.C. Bronze and gold; 7 ⅛ in. (18 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris



(shown actual size)

19 Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II

Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Kalhu (modern Nimrud)
Gypsum alabaster; H. 92 ¼ in. (234.3 cm)
Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1932 (32.143.4,6)

(See poster included in this resource)

On this relief from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II, one of the great Assyrian kings, the king himself wears a conical cap with a small peak as a symbol of his office. He holds a bow in his left hand to symbolize his authority and a ceremonial offering bowl in his right hand. The attendant facing him clears the air around the king with a flywhisk and holds a ladle containing replenishment for the royal bowl. Behind the king stand two other figures back-to-back—another attendant and a protective winged deity who raises his hand in a ritual. The peaceful and ritual character of the scene is reflected in the dignified composure of the figures.

The Assyrian kings, who ruled many peoples and nations, were masters of political propaganda, which they expressed in art and in writing. Wall reliefs in Assyrian palaces portrayed the king as victor in battle, mighty in the hunt, and as the central figure in secular and religious ceremonies such as the one depicted here. A **cuneiform** text runs horizontally across the figures in this relief indicating its importance. The text begins with praises of the king's military prowess. It concludes: "I built this palace with halls of cedar, cypress, juniper, teak … as my royal dwelling." While the narrative scene itself does not correspond to the military nature of the text, the weapons held by the massive muscular and over-lifesized figures of the king and his attendants act as visual counterparts to the textual claims of militaristic power.

Originally many details on the relief were painted black, red, blue, and white, which would have further emphasized the figures' presence. Their garments are embellished with patterns incised in the stone that may represent embroidered designs or precious metal appliqués. The Assyrian sculptors were skilled in contrasting large plain surfaces surrounded by clear contour lines with areas of intricate details and patterns. Attention to detail and a preference for idealized anatomy and facial features of the king and other figures may represent a purposeful set of artistic conventions intended to enhance the visual readability of the relief for a population for whom textual literacy was not widespread.

QUESTIONS

- Which one of these four figures is supernatural? Which figure is the king? How can you tell?
- What is happening in this scene? What clues indicate this?
- Although the king and his two attendants are performing a peaceful ritual honoring the gods, what details show the power and military might of the Assyrian empire?
- Discuss the scale of this relief, its original location, and the cuneiform inscription.
- Notice the contrast between undecorated and richly detailed surfaces.

COMPARE image 17, which also includes a narrative scene. Why would it have been important to convey messages through images as well as through text?

COMPARE image 30, another depiction of a king, noting how they are similar and different. Discuss the role of visual narrative in each.



20 Human-Headed Winged Lion

Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Kalhu (modern Nimrud)
Gypsum alabaster; H. 122 ½ in. (311.2 cm); W. 24 ½ in. (62.2 cm); D. 109 in. (276.9 cm)
Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1932 (32.143.2)

This figure of a winged lion, a symbol of cosmic powers in the ancient Near East, originally stood in Ashurnasirpal II's palace at Nimrud. The **cuneiform** inscription running horizontally across the figure states: "Beasts of the mountains and seas which I had fashioned out of fine white limestone and alabaster, I had set in its gates. I made the palace fittingly imposing." The text goes on to describe Ashurnasirpal's great deeds and powers.

The Assyrians erected enormous stone statues of winged beasts at the entrances and in the doorways to their palaces. Composite creatures, frequently found in ancient Near Eastern art, represented supernatural spirits, which could be either protective or harmful (see "Communicating with the Divine," pp. 39–42). In this case, their function was to protect the king from evil and to impress all those who entered. As transitions between two separate areas, doorways were considered special spaces in need of protection from evil spirits. This winged lion and a winged bull flank the entrance to the large gallery in the Museum that has been set up to evoke an audience hall in Ashurnasirpal's palace.

These beasts seem to be divine creatures; their human heads are crowned with horned caps, the exclusive headgear of deities throughout the ancient Near East. Their human faces and stylized beards resemble the images of Ashurnasirpal depicted on the palace walls.

The Assyrian sculptors skillfully contrasted areas of dense patterning with large, plain, and clearly outlined forms. The lion has five legs so that from the front it appears to stand firmly in place, but is striding forward when viewed from the side. This artistic convention makes the lion seem complete whether viewed from the front or the side, thereby displaying its supernatural and protective powers from both points of view.

QUESTIONS

- Note the composite features of this stone figure. What creatures do you see represented? What features indicate this creature's divine and supernatural powers?
- Imagine this stone figure as one of a matched pair, both about ten feet high, flanking a palace doorway. Why might a ruler place this at such an entrance?
- Why is this figure depicted with five legs? Consider the front view and then the side view as one passes through the doorway. What effect does showing five legs have on your perception of the figure?

COMPARE image 19. Even though the figures have similar facial features, note how they are differentiated through physical attributes.

COMPARE image 22, which also includes composite creatures, noting similarities and differences.



21 Figure of a Tribute Bearer

Neo-Assyrian period, ca. 800–700 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Kalhu (modern Nimrud)
Ivory; H. 5 ¼ in. (13.5 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1960 (60.145.11)

From the ninth to the seventh century B.C., Assyrians ruled Mesopotamia, Syria, and the Levant, and even Egypt for a brief period. All kinds of tribute as well as artists skilled in creating luxury items were brought to the Assyrian capitals from many parts of the empire. This figure brings a monkey, an oryx (an African antelope), and the skin of a leopard—all animals found in lands south of Egypt. These creatures, exotic to the Assyrians, are here depicted being brought by an emissary as gifts to the Assyrian king from his native land. The raw ivory itself must have been imported from Nubia or from lands even farther south.

This beautifully rendered piece, which is also carved on the back, was probably designed to decorate a piece of royal furniture. The lively outlines would be an effective openwork design when placed against bronze or dark wood surfaces. The eyes and the circular indentations on the necklace and armband of the figure were originally inlaid with contrasting materials. Many ivories originally were covered by gold leaf and inlaid with semiprecious stones or colored glass. Such rich combinations of ivory, gold, and brightly colored stones made the thrones of the Assyrian kings famous for their beauty and also advertised in visual form the power of the Assyrian empire.

Ivories excavated at the Assyrian capital of Nimrud were carved in several styles that reflect regional differences. This ivory exhibits traits of the Phoenician style, characterized by the slender, elongated form of the bearer and his animal gifts, the precision of carving and intricacy of detail, and the distinctly Egyptian flavor of both pose and features. Phoenician ivory carvers were strongly influenced by the themes and style of Egyptian art, owing to longstanding ties between the two cultures. Thus, this single example of ivory carving shows us that people, animals, raw materials, and artistic styles all traveled from foreign lands to the Assyrian capital.

QUESTIONS

- What gifts does this figure bring to the Assyrian king? What clues do his gifts provide as to what part of the ancient world he might come from?
- What creates the sense of movement?
- Think about the probable function of this object. In what way did this emphasize the power of the king?
- What does its subject, function, style, and exotic material tell us about trade routes and the extent of the Assyrian empire?

COMPARE image 26, noting similarities and differences in pose, dress, and offerings. How were each of these objects made? Discuss three-dimensional versus two-dimensional sculptural depictions.



(shown actual size)

22 Plaques in the Form of Sphinxes

Iron Age II, ca. 800–700 B.C.
Syria
Bronze; H. 4 7/8 in. (12.4 cm); W. 3 7/8 in. (9.8 cm)
Rogers Fund, 1953 (53.120.1,2)

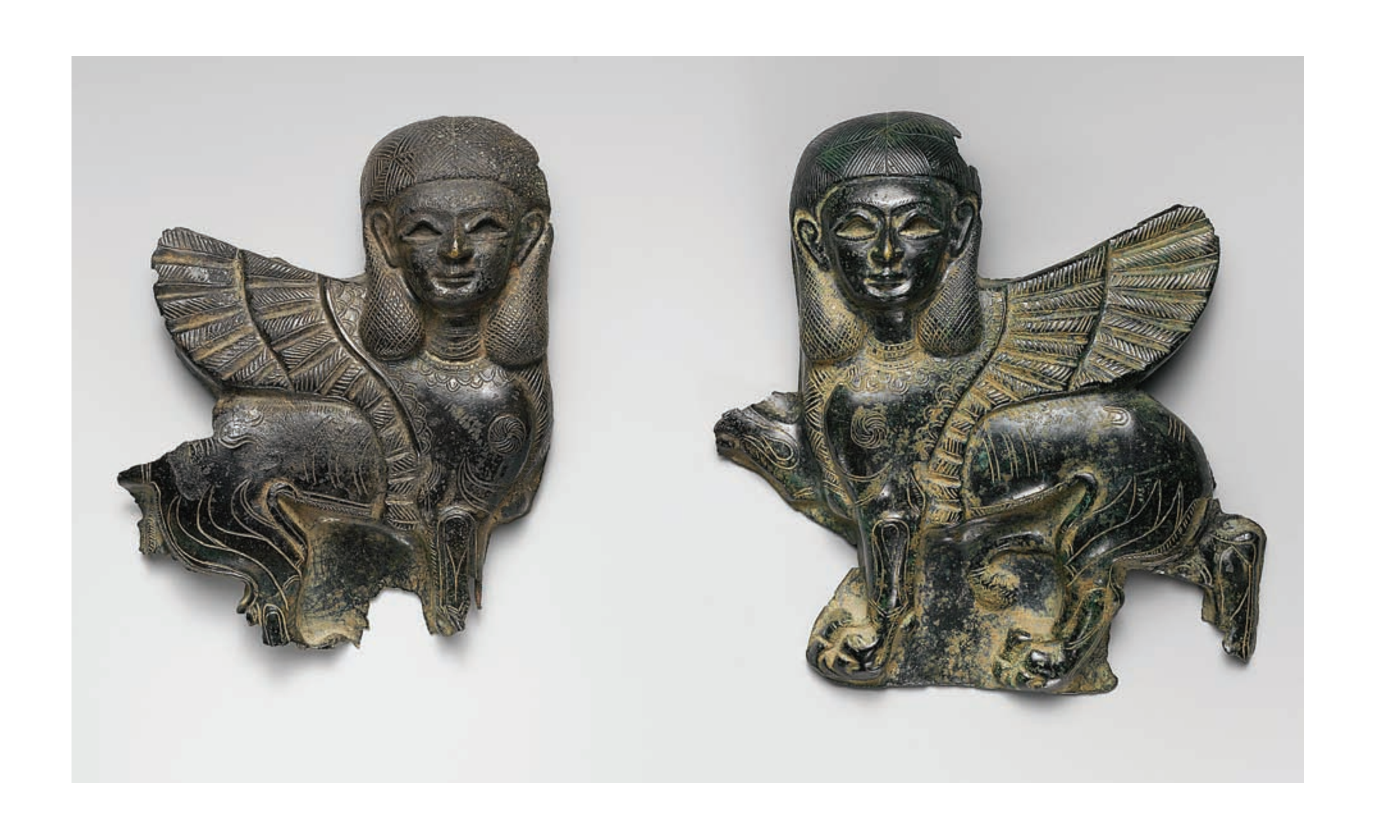
Hammered from single sheets of bronze, these sphinxes look outward toward the viewer. Their striding poses mirror each other and suggest that they may once have been displayed approaching each other. While many of the incised details are the same, differences such as the position of the hair swirl on the chest indicate that two separate craftspeople may have been responsible for the decorative work. The supernatural character of the sphinx, a composite creature with the head of a human and the body of a lion, is an ancient royal symbol of Egypt. Here the sphinx is further enhanced with the addition of wings, an ancient Near Eastern innovation.

The Levant and inland Syria were conquered in the eighth century B.C. by the Assyrian kings. Luxury goods, including metal and carved ivory objects, were produced by skilled Syrian and Phoenician craftspeople and came as tribute and booty to the Assyrian capitals. These works in bronze share certain features with ivories of the same period, both of which were used to decorate palace furnishings. The stance and facial features of the sphinxes as well as the rendering of musculature represented by the flamelike pattern on the hind leg are also found on ivories. Large furniture pieces, doors, and screens made of a rich variety of materials such as ivory, wood, and metalwork outfitted Assyrian palaces, where they would have greatly enhanced the impression of dazzling grandeur. Whatever their exact use, these plaques are examples of the finest north Syrian bronzes known from the first millennium B.C.

QUESTIONS

- What feature does this pair of Syrian sphinxes have that Egyptian sphinxes do not? How do the sphinxes in this pair differ from one another?
- Imagine standing in a Neo-Assyrian palace richly adorned with reliefs (images 19 and 20) and luxury items (images 21 and 22). What impression would this give you of the royal court? How do these artistic choices help define the power of the king and his empire?

COMPARE image 14, noting style, Egyptian influence, and the considerable time span between the cultures that produced these works.



23 Panel with Striding Lion

Neo-Babylonian period, reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, 604–562 B.C.
Mesopotamia, excavated at Babylon (modern Hillah)
Glazed brick; H. 38 ¼ in. (97.2 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1931 (31.13.2)

(See poster included in this resource)

This lion was one of about one hundred and twenty lions made of glazed bricks that lined the walls on both sides of the Processional Way in Babylon. The lions symbolized the powers of Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess of sexual love and war (see "Communicating with the Divine," pp. 39–42). Their function was to protect the Processional Way, particularly during the New Year's Festival when statues of Babylon's gods were carried along the street through the Ishtar Gate to the festival temple (**FIG. 30**). There the king and high priest performed rituals for renewed vitality and fertility in the coming year.

The lions are all in profile, the typical way of depicting animals in relief in ancient Near Eastern art. With fangs bared, eyes wide open, ears laid back, and tail arched, this lion moves forward in magnificent and menacing strides. The molded forms of its body project from the surface and emphasize the animal's muscles and weight. The figure's proportions and anatomy seem lifelike. However, the lozenge-shaped patterns of the ruff and mane, which appear to extend into a wing, suggest that the lion depicted might have possessed supernatural powers.

In the second millennium B.C., a technique evolved in southern Mesopotamia in which unfired bricks were pressed into molds to form raised designs. Bricks could then be fired and in some cases glazed. When Nebuchadnezzar ordered the ancient city of Babylon to be rebuilt in the middle of the first millennium B.C., walls of temples, gates, and palaces were covered with brilliantly colored glazed brick images of mythical, protective beasts and powerful animals sacred to the gods. Through the writings of the ancient Greeks and the Bible, Babylon has survived as a symbol of urban luxury and grandeur.

QUESTIONS

- What do this lion's pose and expression suggest? Some of its features have been rendered naturalistically, others in a stylized manner. What effect do these choices have on the depiction?
- Consider the ancient Babylonian technique for creating such large images. How was this glazed-brick method effective in creating multiple, uniform images?
- Discuss the original placement of the relief and function of the lion as an architectural element. Imagine your impressions if you were to witness a New Year's festival in ancient Babylon.

COMPARE image 19, noting that both are large-scale relief sculptures but use very different techniques and materials.

COMPARE image 20, another creature that guards a passageway, discussing similarities and differences in form and material.

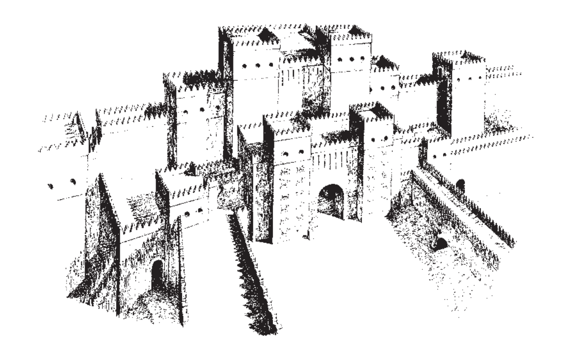


FIGURE 30
Reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate and the Processional Way, Babylon (modern Hillah), Iraq. Based on a model in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum. Illustration by Alfred Bollacher.



24

Incense Burner

ca. 500 B.C.
Southwestern Arabia
Bronze; H. 10 7/8 in. (27.6 cm); W. 9 3/8 in. (23.7 cm)
Gift of Dr. Sidney A. Charlat, in memory of his parents,
Newman and Adele Charlat, 1949 (49.71.2)

This bronze incense burner from southwestern Arabia consists of a cylindrical cup set on a conical base. A rectangular architectural form suggesting a facade extends upward from the cup's front. Its face is decorated with two serpents flanking a round disk set within a crescent, all in low relief. Cast separately, an ibex standing on a plinth projects from the front of the incense burner and may serve as a handle.

From the middle of the first millennium B.C. until the sixth century A.D., the kingdoms of southwestern Arabia gained considerable wealth and power through their control of the trade in incense between Arabia and the lands of the Mediterranean seacoast. Frankincense and myrrh, gum resins that are native to southern Arabia, were widely valued in the ancient world for the preparation of incense, perfumes, cosmetics, and medicines, as well as for use in religious and funerary ceremonies.

The importance of incense in the religion of southwestern Arabia is reflected in this object; the ibex and snakes are powerful **apotropaic** symbols representing virility and fertility, and were frequently associated with local gods. The disk-and-crescent symbol, likewise, probably represents the moon god, the chief god of their pantheon. Given this religious imagery, the building facade depicted here is probably that of a temple.

QUESTIONS

- Besides the ibex, there is another type of creature depicted on this incense burner. What is it? Why might these creatures have been chosen to decorate this object? What celestial symbols appear behind the ibex?
- What type of architectural element does the bronze rectangle behind the ibex suggest?
- Discuss the function of this piece. What do the material and craftsmanship suggest about the importance of incense to the culture that created this object?

COMPARE image 6, and discuss them as ritual objects.



25 Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Leonine Creature

Achaemenid period, ca. 600–500 B.C.
Iran
Gold; H. 6 ¾ in. (17 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1954 (54.3.3)

From the earliest times, lions were symbols of secular and sacred powers in the Near East. In this masterpiece of Achaemenid goldwork, the forepart of a lion gracefully turns into a drinking cup. This type of vessel was probably royal and ceremonial in nature and belongs to a long history of drinking vessels made of precious metals. With ears laid back and claws unsheathed, the lion roars and crouches as if about to attack. The small plumes behind his legs appear to be wings, which imply supernatural powers beyond the natural ones of a lion.

Typical of Achaemenid style, the ferocity of the snarling lion has been tempered and restrained by decorative convention. The basic form of the animal and details such as the claws, fangs, and the muscles tensed around the snarling mouth are portrayed naturalistically. However, the muscles swell into stylized three-dimensional patterns in the face and forelegs. The lion's ruff and mane have been abstracted even further into intricate decorative motifs. This delight in surface patterns is also evident on the cup where the circular bands add richness and emphasize the cylindrical form.

The accomplished craftsperson who created this vessel used gold in a variety of ways. The vessel was constructed out of seven pieces of gold that were hammered into the required shapes and then soldered together so carefully that the seams are imperceptible. The funnel-shaped cup is internally walled off from the lion's body. Every detail is crisply formed. Although difficult to see, even the ridges on the roof of the lion's open mouth were hammered into their anatomically correct forms. Gold, a relatively soft material to shape, can also be pulled out into wires. As yet another sign of the maker's extraordinary skill, the area between the rim of the cup and the first group of bands is filled with 136 feet of finely twisted gold wires encircling the rim in 44 even rows.

QUESTIONS

- Discuss the features and expression of the lion. What is realistic, what is exaggerated, and what is imaginary? Why might the image of a lion have been chosen for this cup?
- Who might have owned such an extraordinary object? On what kind of occasions would the owner have used it?
- Consider the material and elaborate design of this cup. Discuss the techniques, expertise, and labor that went into making it.

COMPARE image 27, another drinking vessel, looking at the style and the way each may have been used.

COMPARE with images 9 and 23, noting the expressiveness of these various lions.



26 Relief Fragment of Attendants Carrying Food

Achaemenid period, ca. 358–338 B.C.
Iran, excavated at Persepolis (modern Takht-i Jamshid)
Limestone; H. 34 in. (86.5 cm)
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1934 (34.158)

This stone fragment was originally part of a larger relief depicting attendants climbing steps. It flanked a stairway leading up to the royal palace founded by Darius the Great at Persepolis, the large ceremonial capital of the Achaemenids who came out of Persia to conquer most of the Near Eastern lands in the sixth century B.C. Darius, one of the mightiest Achaemenid kings, is also well known for his unsuccessful attempt to conquer Greece.

In this relief, two attendants mount a staircase. The figure on the left carries a large wine skin and wears a typical Persian robe that falls in elegant folds. The figure on the right carrying a covered bowl is dressed in a long tunic and close-fitting trousers that seem to be made of heavy wool or leather. This type of clothing was worn by the Medes, a people who inhabited northern Iran. A dagger in a sheath is strapped to his belt. With the exception of the eyes, both figures are in profile. Their forms, although carved naturalistically, are simplified so that outlines and repeated shapes stand out against the undecorated background.

Hundreds of alternating Persian and Median royal attendants are represented on the walls of palace stairways at Persepolis (**FIG. 31**). They bring food and drink for royal feasts or rituals. This relief fragment is an apt illustration of how the Achaemenid rulers incorporated the various peoples within their empire into the court and administration, rather than simply subjecting them to the status of conquered enemies.

QUESTIONS

- Imagine this relief as part of a huge procession of hundreds of different peoples wearing distinctive dress and carrying offerings. How would this convey the power of the Achaemenid ruler?

COMPARE image 19, an Assyrian relief. While the walls of the Assyrian palaces showcased a variety of scenes including offering bearers, image 19 depicts the king's power in his priestly role. Compare how these two reliefs convey the power of the ruler in different ways.



FIGURE 31
View of the *apadana*, or great audience hall, Persepolis, Iran (modern Takht-i Jamshid), 1959



27 Rhyton Terminating in the Forepart of a Wild Cat

Parthian period, ca. 100 B.C.–100 A.D.
Iran
Silver, mercury gilding; H. 10 ⅞ in. (27.5 cm)
Purchase, Rogers Fund; Enid A. Haupt, Mrs. Donald M. Oenslager, Mrs. Muriel Palitz and Geert C. E. Prins Gifts; Pauline V. Fullerton Bequest; and Bequests of Mary Cushing Fosburgh, Edward C. Moore and Stephen Whitney Phoenix, by exchange, 1979 (1979.447)

Rhytons are vessels with two holes, one large opening with which they could be filled and a smaller spout from where liquid could flow out in a stream (see FIG. 12). Fermented beverages such as wine or beer were probably dispensed in these elaborate vessels during royal banquets or as ritual offerings to the gods. Rhytons in the shape of a horn, made of metal or ivory, and ending in a depiction of an animal's head, chest, and front legs, were among the luxury wares produced for the Parthian royal court. This spectacular rhyton ends in the forepart of a wild cat, perhaps a panther, with a spout for pouring in the middle of the chest. The cat snarls with ears alert and claws spread, ready to pounce. A gilded collar around the neck may indicate that a tamed predator is depicted here.

Draped around the wild cat's chest is a garland of ivy and grape-vines with clusters of gilded grapes. The panther, ivy, and grape-vines with their fruit are all symbols associated with Dionysos, the Greek god of fertility and wine. In the centuries after Alexander the Great's invasion of the Near East, Greek influence was especially widespread in the parts of the region that had at one time been ruled by Alexander's generals and their descendants. For example, Dionysiac images appear in the art of the Parthians and Sasanians, empires that controlled Mesopotamia and lands as far east as present-day Afghanistan.

Both rhytons and other animal-headed cups were types of vessels with a long tradition in the ancient Near East. In its imagery and form, this rhyton brings together Near Eastern and Greek elements and attests to the wide range of cultural interaction and influences in the period spanning the first century B.C. to the first century A.D.

QUESTIONS

- Notice which elements of this vessel have been gilded. What visual effect does this have?
- Find the small spout. How would this vessel have been held and used to drink and to pour liquids? What kind of fluid might cups like this have held?
- What features suggest that Parthian rulers who commissioned cups like this were familiar with the religious customs and rituals of the Greco-Roman world?

COMPARE image 25, another drinking vessel, noting material, technique, and animal representation. Focus on the different ways in which gold is used. Compare the different attitudes of these creatures depicted in action.



28 Gravestone

ca. 100–300 A.D.
Syria, probably from Palmyra
Limestone; H. 20 ¼ in. (51.4 cm)
Purchase, 1902 (02.29.1)

This sculpture in high relief shows full-length figures of a man, his son, and two daughters. It is a gravestone depicting a banquet scene that probably sealed the opening of a family burial niche in Palmyra. The man is reclining on a richly decorated couch, holding a palm spray or cluster of dates in his right hand and a cup in his left. The two daughters wear veils, necklaces, and earrings. The son wears a necklace and holds grapes in his right hand and a bird in his left. It bears the following Aramaic inscription: "Zabdibol, son of Mokimu, son of Nurbel, son of Zabda, son of 'Abday, son of Zabdibol, Tadmur his daughter, Mokimu his son, 'Alayyat his daughter."

By the mid-first century A.D., Palmyra—or "place of the palms"—was a wealthy and impressive city located along the caravan routes that linked the Parthian Near East with Roman-controlled Mediterranean ports. During the period of great prosperity that followed, the citizens of Palmyra adopted customs and modes of dress from both the Iranian Parthian world to the east and the Greco-Roman west. This blend of eastern and western elements is also present in Palmyrene art. In this sculpture, the care lavished on details of dress and jewelry recalls the Parthian approach to figural representation while the postures and the distinct sense of volume conveyed by the carving in high relief are Greco-Roman in style.

Large-scale funerary structures were common in Palmyra. Vaults, some of which were belowground, had interior walls that were constructed to form burial compartments in which the deceased, extended full length, were placed. Sculpted limestone reliefs depicting the deceased and often carrying an Aramaic inscription giving the subject's name and genealogy represented the "personality" or "soul" of the person. These were constructed as markers for eternity much like modern gravestones and mausoleums.

QUESTIONS

- Who is the main figure depicted here? How can you tell?
- Discuss the function of this relief and the clues that identify this group as a family. What details show that the people of Palmyra were trading with the ancient Romans and others?

COMPARE with images 19 and 26, noting the different styles of these three reliefs.

COMPARE image 27, discussing which elements in each attest to the wide range of cultural interactions in the age in which they were produced.



29

Head of a King

Sasanian period, ca. 300–400 A.D.
Iran
Silver, mercury gilding; H. 15 ¾ in. (40 cm)
Fletcher Fund, 1965 (65.126)

This head is an exquisite example of Sasanian metalwork that without doubt represents a powerful ruler. An elaborate crown swells upward from a crenellated and beaded base. Centered on the crown is a crescent moon. The ruler's face confronts us with a stern, almost fierce expression, which is created by the firm mouth and the large, deeply cut eyes with their targetlike pupils. Magnificently coiffed hair, a curled mustache, and a braided beard surround the smooth, polished face with rich patterns. The ruler's large ears, decorated with ear ornaments, bend forward as if to suggest his attentiveness. The power of his staring eyes and his arched nose seem to suggest that the metalsmith was attempting to convey an idealized ruler rather than an individual likeness (See "The Royal Image," pp. 34–38).

Because the base of the neck has been broken away, it is not known whether the head was originally part of a statue or whether it was meant to be a bust. It was made of one large piece of silver hammered up into the basic shape of the head with further modeling done in **repoussé**. Details were then deeply **chased** into the outer surface.

A Sasanian king can usually be distinguished by his crown. Each king was identified by name and was depicted wearing a personalized crown on Sasanian coins. Unfortunately, no exact match has been found for this royal crown, but its style is similar to the crowns worn by kings in the fourth century A.D.

QUESTIONS

- What features of this image do you notice first? What impact does that have? What details tell us that it represents a very powerful king?
- Discuss the way in which this head was made. Notice the variety of surface textures.

COMPARE image 11, also the head of a ruler, noting differences in style, expression, and manufacture. Which one appears more lifelike to you?



30 Plate with a Hunting Scene

Sasanian period, ca. 400–500 A.D.
Iran
Silver, mercury gilding; H. 1 5⁄8 in. (4.1 cm); D. 7 7⁄8 in. (20.1 cm)
Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1994 (1994.402)

The imagery on this plate represents the earliest known depiction of a well-known episode from the story of Bahram Gur or Bahram V, the Sasanian king (r. 420–438) (**FIG. 32**). The story seems to have been popular for centuries—both in Sasanian times and under the Islamic rule that followed—but was only recorded in the *Shahnamah*, or Book of Kings, by Firdausi in the early eleventh century A.D., centuries after this plate was created. The *Shahnamah* recounts how Bahram Gur, challenged to feats of archery by his favorite musician, Azadeh, changed a male gazelle to a female and a female to a male and pinned the hind leg of an animal to its ear. This plate directly refers to the story of Bahram Gur because the horns of the male have been shot off with an arrow, transforming his appearance into that of a female, while the two arrows embedded in the head of the female make her appear to have horns like those of a male gazelle.

This plate was likely hammered into shape and then decorated to highlight its varied surface contours and colors, making its human and animal forms stand out in relief. It was partially gilded using a mixture of mercury and gold, which could be painted onto the surface. Large numbers of gold and silver vessels made during Sasanian rule in Iran and Mesopotamia have survived, demonstrating an ancient Near Eastern tradition that spread westward to the Hellenistic and Roman world, where vessels made of precious metals also became symbols of power and prestige (see **FIG. 8**). These objects, presumably official state products, were presented as royal gifts to persons of importance within Iran and beyond its borders.

QUESTIONS

- Describe the narrative depicted here.
- Who is the main figure? How is he emphasized?
- How did the silversmith achieve the sense of action and movement in this scene?
- Why might the ancient tales of heroic Persian kings like Bahram Gur have been important to medieval Iranian kings? Can you think of legends or stories or historical figures or events that might be depicted on commemorative objects today?

COMPARE image 8, noting similarities and differences in depictions of a hunting scene. Discuss the continuity of the theme of the king as hunter.





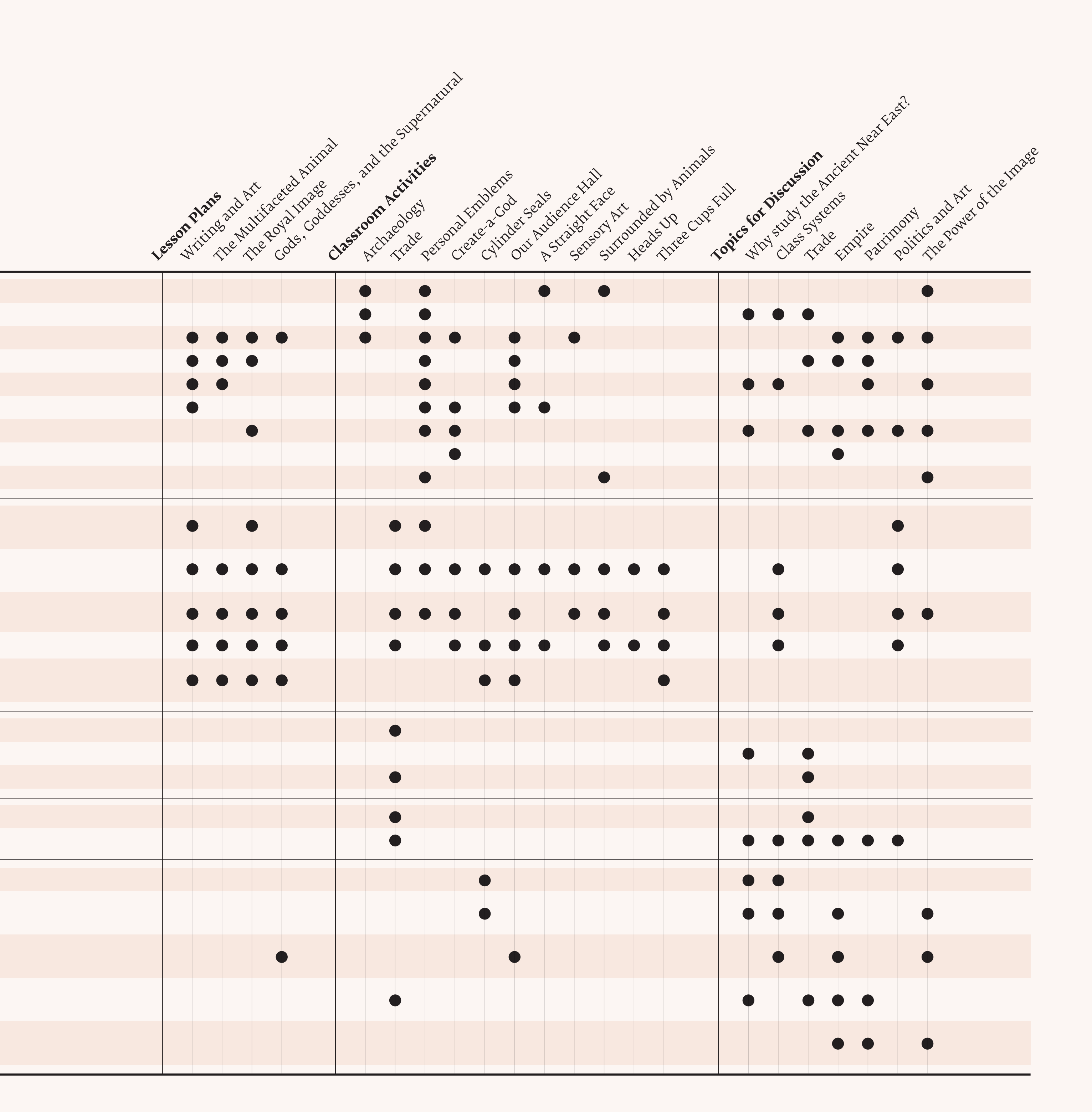
FIGURE 32
Bowl in the Mina'i style showing Bahram Gur. Iran, Seljuq period, 1040–1196 A.D. Glazed fritware; diam. 8 11⁄16 in. (22.06 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Rogers Fund and Gift of The Schiff Foundation, 1957 (57.36.2)



National Standards for Education: Curriculum Connections

The national standards for education, developed by curriculum specialists, classroom educators, and experts in national and education organizations, offer teachers learning guidelines for K–12 students to be used on a national level. The standards outline what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and in all subject areas. To assist teachers with their classroom application and curriculum requirements, this chart correlates these national standards with the content of the lesson plans, classroom activities, and topics for discussion in this publication.

English Language Arts	Evaluating Data
	Participating in Society
	Applying Language Skills
	Evaluation Strategies
	Communication Skills
	Communication Strategies
	Applying Knowledge
	Multicultural Understanding
	Developing Research Skills
Arts/Visual Arts	Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines
	Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
	Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
	Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions
	Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
Social Sciences: Economics	Voluntary Exchange
	Gain from Trade
	Supply and Demand
Social Sciences: Geography	Environment and Society
	Human Systems
Social Sciences: World History	Era 1: The Beginnings of Human Society
	Era 2: Early Civilizations and the Emergence of Pastoral Peoples 4000–1000 B.C.
	Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires 1000 B.C.–300 A.D.
	Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300–1000 A.D.
	Era 9: The 20th Century Since 1945—Promises and Paradoxes



Lesson Plans				**Classroom Activities**											**Topics for Discussion**						
Writing and Art	The Multifaceted Animal	The Royal Image	Gods, Goddesses, and the Supernatural	Archaeology	Trade	Personal Emblems	Create-a-God	Cylinder Seals	Our Audience Hall	A Straight Face	Sensory Art	Surrounded by Animals	Heads Up	Three Cups Full	Why study the Ancient Near East?	Class Systems	Trade	Empire	Patrimony	Politics and Art	The Power of the Image
				●		●				●		●									●
				●		●									●	●	●				
●	●	●	●	●		●	●		●		●							●	●	●	●
●	●	●				●			●								●	●	●		
●	●					●			●						●	●			●		●
●						●	●		●	●											
		●				●	●								●		●	●	●	●	●
							●											●			
						●						●									●
●		●			●	●														●	
●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●				●	
●	●	●	●		●	●	●		●		●	●		●		●				●	●
●	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	●		●	●	●		●				●	
●	●	●	●					●	●					●							
					●																
															●		●				
					●												●				
					●												●				
					●										●	●	●	●	●	●	
								●							●	●					
								●							●	●		●			●
			●						●							●		●			●
					●										●		●	●	●		
																		●	●		●

LESSON PLAN

Writing and Art

Objectives

Students will explore:

- ways that images communicate meaning;
- how images and text relate to one another; and
- the different functions that images and text serve.

Images

Image 8	Cylinder Seal and Modern Impression: Hunting Scene
Image 9	Foundation Peg in the Form of the Forepart of a Lion
Image 10	Statue of Gudea
Image 19	Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II
Image 28	Gravestone

Materials

- Drawing paper
- Colored pencils or markers

Introduction

Text communicates meaning. The ability to read a script (and interpret it) is to be textually literate. There are other forms of literacy, such as media literacy or visual literacy. The visual arts can also communicate meaning. Sometimes, the way an observer is meant to read a work of art is open-ended, and many different interpretations are welcome. Other times, a very precise meaning is intended, and the art will be read as formally as a piece of text by an observer who is visually literate. Ancient Near Eastern art often falls in the latter category (images 10, 19), and it is the work of archaeologists and art historians to analyze such images. Another way of interpreting the world of the ancient Near East has been through the translation of cuneiform, the region's primary script. Combining these two approaches is especially fruitful, since art from the area often incorporates both text and imagery, as shown in each of the images featured in this lesson. However, the relationship between text and image is not always straightforward. Inscriptions can identify a person by name, such as the owner of a cylinder seal (image 8) or a person commemorated in a funerary relief (image 28). They can also give more information, such as naming the purpose of the object (image 9) or memorializing a ruler's name and deeds (image 10). In many instances, though related to the imagery, the text serves to give observers further information beyond what they are seeing (see image 19).

Activity: Drawing Words and Reading Pictures

Before looking at the images, direct students to select an exciting scene from a favorite book. Have them draw a detailed, colorful picture of this scene in one panel. Caution them not to tell anyone what they are drawing. On the back of the drawing, students should write a one-sentence caption, stating what is happening in the scene. Once everyone is done, hang all of the pictures on the board, with the captions and names of the students hidden on the back, and give each one a number. Direct students to study the pictures, and then write their own one-sentence caption for each, based on what they can see in the picture. When everyone is

finished, have students share their proposed captions in small groups, and then reveal the "true" captions. Discuss similarities and differences in the students' interpretations. Was it difficult to read these pictures? What elements were easy to read? Which were hard or impossible? Why might that be? How does it change the picture to have an accompanying caption? Does it support the picture or distract from it?

Using this activity, define the term "literacy" with students. It may help to work up to this concept by discussing the definitions of "read" and "write" first. Explore together what it is to understand the meaning of something you see. What is our textual alphabet? Based on the activity above, what might be symbols of our shared visual alphabet? For example, can we all read a smiley face? What does the color red mean to us? And how might other cultures interpret these visual symbols?

Discussion
Together, look at the five images. Have students think about what is going on in each image before providing them with the title and background information. What do they see? What kind of object do they think this is? What might its purpose be? What story might the image be telling? Do they see any text in the image? What do they think the text might say? Help them to recognize the ways in which they are engaging their visual literacy in order to "read" the images. Once you have provided the students with the pertinent information for each, explore together any surprises or reflections on how their interpretation was similar to or different from that provided. Explore the following questions:

- How does art communicate meaning?
- How does text communicate meaning?
- What role does text play in art?
- How does the text support the art in these images and vice versa?
- Does the text conflict with or give additional information beyond what is seen in the art?

Related Activities
Personal Emblems, p. 122
Cylinder Seals, p. 123

Note
If doing this lesson with younger children for whom writing is still difficult, have them work in small groups to create a tableau of a scene in a classroom picture book. They should use their bodies and faces to show the moment, but must freeze in one position. Have their classmates try to guess together which scene it is, and record these ideas and a quick sketch on the board to aid discussion. Then, look at the pictures in the book, with the accompanying caption. Discuss how the words help the reader interpret the picture. Ask the children to reflect back on how they "read" picture books before they knew how to read.



LESSON PLAN

The Multifaceted Animal

Objectives

Students will:

- explore the array of functions animals served in art;
- consider the purpose and meaning of each of these functions; and
- draw inferences about figural and literal relationships between humans and animals.

Images

Image 1	Storage Jar Decorated with Mountain Goats
Image 4	Proto-Cuneiform Tablet with Seal Impressions
Image 6	Vessel Stand with Ibex Support
Image 8	Cylinder Seal and Modern Impression: Hunting Scene
Image 9	Foundation Peg in the Form of the Forepart of a Lion
Image 17	Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Stag
Image 21	Figure of a Tribute Bearer
Image 23	Panel with Striding Lion (see also poster)
Image 24	Incense Burner
Image 25	Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Leonine Creature
Image 27	Rhyton Terminating in the Forepart of a Wild Cat

Materials

- Scrap paper
- Good drawing paper
- Optional: paint, watercolors, or pen and ink for final drawings

Introduction

Ancient Near Eastern works of art are adorned with images of animals of all types, ranging from the practical to the ceremonial to the symbolic. The people of the region viewed animals in myriad ways, including as partner, property, prey, enemy, transport, entertainment, and divine representative. This multifaceted relationship is evident in ancient Near Eastern art. In some works, the animal depicted seems to represent only itself—as a graceful, important, or powerful creature. In others, animals are used to symbolize royal power (image 25), represent a deity (image 17), or provide divine protection (image 23). In the example of the *Figure of a Tribute Bearer* (image 21), the monkey, oryx, and leopard skin illustrate the power and dominance of the Assyrians over their neighbors.

Discussion

What sorts of relationships do we have with animals in our society? As a class, make a list of the different ways we interact with, use, and perceive animals. This should include aspects such as: owning as pets, hunting, using as a source of food, as mascots, or in the naming of sports teams or cars, representing characteristics (the sly fox), and serving as omens (the snake in a dream).

As a class, look at the images listed at left. Throughout the observation, solicit predictions and guesses from students before providing all of the background information. Encourage them to look closely at the details of the objects and the animals as they try to read the imagery. Consider the following questions for each:

- What animal is depicted?
- Does this animal look entirely naturalistic? Why or why not? Why do you think these choices were made in its depiction?
- What type of object is this?
- What purpose does this object serve?
- What purpose does the animal serve on or as part of this object? Why do you think this?
- What is the relationship between the animal and the object?

- What might the animal's presence on or as part of this object tell us about how this animal was perceived by people of the ancient Near East?

Activity: Ceremonial Vessels

Each student will design an animal vessel to be used at New Year's or his or her next birthday in order to ensure a good year. Students should select a single animal for their vessel. This animal should not only represent a creature, but should represent the qualities, talents, and strengths of the student. When planning their vessel, direct students to ask themselves:

- With what types of animals do they have contact? How do they feel about these animals?
- What animals do they admire? Identify with? Fear?
- What facial and body expression do they want the animal to have?
- Do they want to draw a naturalistic (image 17) or stylized (image 25) version of the animal?

Once students have chosen their animal, they should create a careful drawing of their animal vessel. You may want to post images 17, 25, and 27 around the room to help them do this. You may choose to have students paint, watercolor, or use pen and ink to create this drawing.

When students have finished their design, have them write a description for the vessel. This description should include:

- Title
- Date and place of origin
- Purpose of the vessel
- Animal featured
- Symbolism and power of the animal featured
- Details of the ceremonial use of the vessel

The drawings and object descriptions can be posted as a classroom exhibition, and perhaps each student can present his or her vessel and its "history." During the share, encourage students to explore the symbolism of each other's choices, as well as the similarities and differences among their work.

Related Activities

Personal Emblems, p. 122
Sensory Art, p. 124
Surrounded by Animals, p. 125
Three Cups Full, p. 125

Extensions

Make the vessels out of clay, plaster of Paris, or papier-mâché. Have students paint their vessel gold or silver, or use color to emphasize details otherwise hard to render.

Connections

Language Arts

- Direct students to choose an animal depicted in ancient Near Eastern art and write an origin story about this animal. The tale should describe how the animal came to be the way it was by focusing on a distinctive trait. For example, a student might choose to describe how the ibex got its long horns. These tales usually involve deities.

Science

- Have students select an animal native to the ancient Near East to research. The choices could include animals that have been displaced from the modern Middle East, such as lions, ostriches, and elephants. They might research information on the animal's habitat, form, food, position in the food chain, and relationship with humans. They can show their learning by writing a research paper or giving a presentation.



LESSON PLAN

The Royal Image

Objectives

Students will:

- identify indicators showing a powerful ruler and those showing a pious ruler;
- explore the purposes of depicting rulers as both powerful and pious; and
- consider the cultural implications of this dual role.

Images

Image 9	Foundation Peg in the Form of the Forepart of a Lion
Image 10	Statue of Gudea
Image 11	Head of a Ruler
Image 19	Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II (see also poster)
Image 29	Head of a King
Image 30	Plate with a Hunting Scene

Materials

- Photographs of a world leader, such as a United States president
- Scrap paper
- Poster paper or cardboard or butcher paper and papier-mâché
- Tempera paints and brushes

Introduction

The rulers of the ancient Near East used self-promotion and propaganda to celebrate in art their power, achievements, and affiliation with the gods. Palaces and plates were adorned with reliefs depicting the ruler's military and personal strength (images 19, 30), while lines of text sometimes scrolled across objects, further emphasizing the ruler's power (images 10, 19). Idealized images of kings highlighted signs of strength and wisdom (images 10, 29). All of these depictions employ the standard attributes listed on page 35 to leave little doubt as to the inherent royalty of those shown. Elite materials and manufacture alone can also suggest that a representation may be royal (image 11). Another way for a ruler to represent himself and communicate his deeds—foremost among which were the building of temples and palaces—was through an inscription giving his name and accomplishments (images 9, 10, 19).

The authority that the ruler exercised in the earthly realm derived directly from the gods. As a result, the roles of mighty king and pious priest were inextricably linked. Alongside panels detailing a king's military might, scenes illustrating the same king engaged in divine rituals could be found—and sometimes the two were even combined (image 19). Statues of rulers posed in the attitude of prayer were also placed in temple sanctuaries, forever seeking the gods' favor and protection (image 10). In this way, rulers were placed in the context of the divine, their position sanctioned by the gods and therefore inalienable.

Discussion

To have students start thinking about the ways a ruler promotes his or her right to hold power, begin with a discussion of how curent world leaders do this. Collect photographs from a newspaper or the Internet, or artistic representations, showing leaders in powerful poses (with their military, with a stern face, standing in front of or higher than other officials, at the head of a table) and in pious ones (with hand over heart looking at their flag, head bowed in prayer, at a sacred or religious site). Have the students identify for themselves as many of the

signals of power and of piety as they can. Why is the leader depicted this way? Why is it important to look powerful? What is the use of looking pious or devout? Then, look at the six images listed at left. How do we know these figures are royalty? Which attributes of royalty are shown in each? Which images show a ruler in a position of power? How is this done? Which show a ruler in a pious act, respecting the gods? How is this achieved? Why might a ruler want to be shown in each pose? Why might a ruler want to be shown as both powerful and pious? What does it tell us about the modern world and the culture of the ancient Near East that these are the two essential faces of the ruler?

Activity: The King's Audience Hall

Tell students that the class has been charged with designing the new king's audience hall. It is here that he will greet visitors and broadcast his royal attributes. Divide the class into four groups, and assign each one of the following topics: Military Might, Hunting Prowess, Ritual Roles, and Building Activities. With younger students, provide illustrations of the six images featured in this lesson and a fact sheet of your creation detailing information about their topic and how it was depicted in the ancient Near East. With older students, direct the groups to do their own research from classroom materials or the image descriptions in this resource.

Once they have done their research, each group should plan a relief or a sculpture based on known royal attributes and ancient Near Eastern symbols of power and piety. Make sure that students consider size, pose, features, symbols, clothing, setting, colors, purpose, impact, and impression.

Depending on the age, school structure, and time allotted for this activity, have students create group posters, cardboard walls that can be assembled into a small model, full-size murals on butcher paper to be hung on the walls of the classroom, or cardboard or papier-mâché sculptures.

Related Activities

Our Audience Hall, p. 123
A Straight Face, p. 123
Heads Up, p. 125

Connections

Language Arts

- Read the *Epic of Gilgamesh* with students (see Selected Resources, p. 131). Write an epic about the king whose hall the class has designed, with each group creating a chapter that narrates their design.

Math/Science

- Design reliefs/sculpture to scale with the human body.
- Build an architecturally sound, scaled model of the hall to house the designs.



LESSON PLAN

Gods, Goddesses, and the Supernatural

Objectives

Students will:

- identify the forms representative of gods and goddesses;
- explore the meaning of figures combining human and animal parts; and
- consider the symbolic power of supernatural figures.

Images

Image 2	Striding Horned Figure
Image 3	Kneeling Bull Holding a Spouted Vessel
Image 12	Shaft-Hole Axe
Image 14	Furniture Support
Image 15	Pendants and Beads
Image 16	Helmet with Divine Figures
Image 17	Vessel Terminating in the Forepart of a Stag
Image 18	Enthroned Deity
Image 20	Human-Headed Winged Lion
Image 22	Plaques in the Form of Sphinxes
Image 23	Panel with Striding Lion

Materials

- Drawing paper
  See also below under Activity

Introduction

The pantheon of ancient Near Eastern gods and goddesses was vast. Context and a rich array of visual clues served to identify individual deities within works of art. Each major god or goddess could be portrayed in multiple ways, such as: through a divine emblem (image 15), a representative animal (image 23), or in a distinguishing human form (images 16, 18). In many cases, when a deity was portrayed in material form, the object was considered imbued with the deity's power (images 15, 16, 17, 18, 23). Representations of gods and goddesses weren't the only powerful images, however; beings composed of both human and animal parts were also considered to be potent, whether good or bad, and at times even semidivine (images 2, 3, 14, 20, 22). Their power was drawn from their composite nature, in which defining traits of an animal (or animals) were combined. While their specific uses are not always clear to us now, certain images of supernatural beings are thought to have had a protective function (image 20) or held ritual power (image 3).

Discussion

Together, discuss the significance of sacred objects valued in the cultures represented within the class (examples: Qur'an, cross, statue of Ganesha, statue of Buddha). If students are old enough, this discussion should explore the dual role of many of these objects, which serve as both a symbol of a culture and as sacred entities in and of themselves.

Look at the eleven images listed at left. Five focus on forms that represent deities, and the others are beings with supernatural powers. For each, discuss:

- What type of object is this?
- What form of being is depicted in or on this object? Is it a divine emblem, representative animal, god, or a supernatural being? Or a combination of these?
- What gives this object power?
- What purpose might the power in this object serve?
- Does this being seem benevolent or malevolent? Why?

Activity: A Personalized Protector

Charge students with creating their own supernatural being and depicting it in the form of a protective amulet for themselves. Their creation must include at least one human part and at least one animal part, though it may include parts from a variety of different animals. Have students consider the following questions as they design their being:

- Who does this being protect?
- What is this being protecting against?
- What form will the amulet take? Is it part of a practical object (images 14, 16), or is its sole purpose to protect (image 20)?
- What animal characteristics do they want their being to possess? Which animals embody these characteristics? Which parts of the animals are most symbolic of these characteristics?
- How will this being express its power? Through pose (images 2, 18, 20)? Purpose (image 16)? Sound (image 3)? What are other ways to express power?

Once students have completed their design, they may do any number of things with it, depending on class size, age of students, school setting, amount of time allotted for the lesson, and available materials. Ideas include:

- Create a pendant of the protective being. Cut a silhouette out of tag board, and cover it in metal foil. Leave a long strip along the top to curve around and staple or glue together. Then, slip a cord or piece of yarn through the loop to create a necklace. They can also turn this into a pin by gluing a safety pin to the back.
- Make a statue of the being out of clay, plaster of Paris, or papier-mâché.
- Embody the being by making a mask and any necessary body parts such as wings or hooves out of tag board, cloth, or papier-mâché.
- Dramatize the being through a monologue, present it in a pose, or create a group display with everyone posing together and inviting others to peruse the class "gallery."

Related Activities

Personal Emblems, p. 122
Create-a-God, p. 122

Connections

Language Arts

- Write a creation story for the protective being, detailing who made it and why. This could be turned into a picture book as well.
- View and read *Marduk: King of the Gods*, the animated picture book provided on the CD. Write a story that incorporates a pantheon of gods and goddesses, but focuses on one of them as the main character.



Classroom Activities

Archaeology
Gather a group of everyday "artifacts," such as a book, pencil, coin, wristwatch, eyeglasses, cell phone, shoe, etc, and display them at the front of the room. You may want to allow students to pull them out of a large bag one at a time, to add to the experience. A thousand years from now, what evidence about our civilization might an archaeologist deduce from these objects? Which of these artifacts would have survived? Which would have disintegrated? How might that limit the archaeologist's interpretation of the artifacts and our way of life? What would have happened to most of our written records? What about our technological artifacts?

Trade
The ancient Near East was a dynamic place, characterized by much travel, trade, and interaction among the various societies that inhabited the region. Evidence for this exchange exists in many written documents (image 13), and also survives in the era's art. The objects featured in this publication were made from many different materials. Using the map provided on page 5 as a guide, create a chart listing raw materials and their place(s) of origin. Then, as you consider any or all of the objects, note whether the material(s) used came from the same region as the artifact, or from a different one.

Personal Emblems
To personalize and give context to discussions about the meaning behind the nontextual symbols found in these ancient Near Eastern works of art, have students compile a list of everyday picture symbols found in advertising or pop culture, and who or what each represents. If possible, take students on a walk around the neighborhood and have them record each symbol they see; otherwise, have them make the list at home, either from the area around their house or from ads on TV and in magazines. Together, discuss these symbols. Why did the people or companies who designed them choose these specific symbols? What do we think of when we see them? What might we think if we didn't know what they were?

Next, explore the symbols in the images included in this resource. What do the divine emblems of each god tell us about their power (image 15)? Why is the lion a representative of divinity (image 23) or of royalty (image 25)? Based on this discussion and the previous one about modern symbols, have students design a large, full-color, nontextual, single symbol to represent themselves. They should be prepared to discuss why they chose this design, including the colors, and to share what they feel it says about themselves. You may also choose to have students try to interpret each symbol before revealing to whom they belong.

Create-a-God
Discuss the ancient Near Eastern gods and goddesses with students, as well as the many ways each could be manifested or represented (images 15, 16, 18, 23). Have students consider what they feel is most important, powerful, frightening, and cherished in life. Then, direct each to create a god to embody or protect one of these phenomena. They can draw this god or goddess, design an emblem to symbolize them, select an animal to represent them, and write a creation story for their deity.

Cylinder Seals

Materials

Self-hardening clay, plastic straws (cut in half), toothpicks, stamp pads and/or tempera paint

Preparations

Roll out a piece of self-hardening clay into a cylindrical, snakelike form, at least one inch in diameter. Cut the cylindrical form into sections of about two inches in length. At both ends of each section, push a piece of plastic straw lengthwise into the center of each section.

Activity

In the ancient Near East a cylinder seal, when rolled across a clay tablet, could be used almost as a signature is used today. Seals were unique to their respective owners and often named the owners and their professions. They were decorated with images that must have held special significance. Look at the seal and seal impressions included in this resource and discuss the figures and activities depicted (images 4, 8, 13). While we cannot know for certain, what might the images tell us about the bearer and what might be some possible reasons for the choice of imagery?

Ask the students to design a scene or tableau with humans, animals, or gods that they feel represent them. (They can plan their design on a strip of paper of which the height is the length of the cylinder and the width is the circumference of the cyinder.) What animals do they feel a kinship with? What natural elements do they prefer? What are their favorite activities? Once students have planned their design, ask them to carve it on the clay cylinder. They should carve below the surface of the clay, so that when they roll their seal along a surface, the design is raised. When they are finished carving, let the seal dry by placing the straw either horizontally between two raised surfaces (such as two stacks of books), or vertically in a can or jar. Make sure that the damp clay of the seal doesn't touch another surface while it is drying.

Once the seal is thoroughly dry, roll it along the surface of a flattened piece of wet clay to create a seal relief. Instead (or in addition), have students roll their seal over a stamp pad or in a dish of tempera paint, and then roll it along a sheet of paper to create a print. When students have finished using their seals, they can carefully slide out the straws and string the seals on cords to wear them as a necklace.

Our Audience Hall

The audience hall of King Ashurnasirpal II's palace was decorated with once colorful, monumental wall reliefs depicting the king as both pious servant to the gods and masterful ruler of the secular world (image 19). The imagery, size, and colors (which often did not survive the test of time), combined to inspire awe and respect in visitors. As a class, turn your room into an audience hall, announcing the talents and virtues of the class as a whole. Before you begin, list the most important things the class wants visitors to know about them as a group [consider Ashurnasirpal's desire that his visitors know how well he served the gods (image 19)]. Select four of the most essential aspects, and assign one to each of four small groups. Each of these groups should then design a scene that tells the story of this concept *in pictures only*. Once groups know what scene they will be depicting, give them graph paper on which to plan their drawing. Make sure that the number of units in the graph paper can correspond to the same number of units on a piece of butcher paper—for example, twenty half-inch units on paper should correspond to twenty four-inch units on butcher paper. Then, once students have drawn a corresponding graph on a long piece of butcher paper, they should transfer their drawing square by square. This will ensure a realistic scale and reinforce the monumentality of the picture. To finish the relief, have students paint it with bright colors. Finally, hang one relief on each wall, thus transforming the room into an audience hall. You may want to have a ceremonial opening of the hall, with food, music, and a display of any other work the class has done during the study.

A Straight Face

Depictions of humans in ancient Near Eastern art were usually highly stylized. Faces were idealized, and features were exaggerated in order to convey information. For example, the wide eyes in image 29 are meant to advertise the king's wisdom, and the prominent ears in image 10 communicate awareness. With your students, explore the images in this resource that exemplify the ancient Near Eastern visual language for depicting rulers (images 10, 11, 19, 29, 30). Then, have students make their own "Royal Mask," in which they employ the details used in ancient Near Eastern art to show that they have the essential qualities of a ruler, such as wisdom, strength, awareness, insight, and so forth. They should be sure to include appropriate hairstyles (including beards) and headdresses. These can be made out of cardboard, with details painted in, or they can be made out of papier-mâché or plaster of Paris.

If time allows, you may want to extend this activity to include a discussion of our culture's visual language. What does it mean when we draw someone with an upturned mouth? What about someone with wide eyes? What does a raised eyebrow signify?

Sensory Art

The original purpose of an ancient artifact is not always clear. Archaeologists and art historians make interpretations and posit educated hypotheses based on what they know about the culture, materials, and symbolism of an object. But seeing certain objects outside of their original context can negate otherwise vital factors—and one of these factors is how the senses were originally intended to experience the object. For images 17, 25, and 27, we are left to wonder what liquid each held, how and when it was poured out, and who or what it was poured into or on. It has been proposed that image 3 may have been a noisemaker of some sort, perhaps to be used in a ritual. But what type of sound did it make? Was it rhythmic or staccato? Did it hold a few large kernels or many small ones? And image 24 is thought to have been an incense burner. What type of incense burned upon its surface, and for how long? In what contexts was it used? For all of these images, we can ask: how did it smell? Sound? Taste? And how might the addition of a sensory experience change the way we view the object?

To help students investigate these ideas, you may consider any or all of the following:

- Bring in incense, a maraca (or cup with dried beans in it), and three glasses—one holding water, another grape juice, and the third empty (to serve as a repository as you pour the liquids back and forth). As you look at images 3, 17, 24, 25, and 27, employ the appropriate prop to reenact the sensory experience as closely as possible. Discuss how the added element alters the effect of the object.

- Ask students to write a sensory poem for each of these objects. At their most basic, these poems are usually five lines, and each line begins:

  I see…
  I hear…
  I smell…
  I taste…
  I feel…

  Have students share their poems, and as a class, contrast the experience of viewing the objects in this way, with that of only using the sense of sight.

- As a class, make a list of all of the objects in the room that make noise or produce a smell, even if that is not their primary function. This list may include a clock, pencil sharpener, plant, faucet, glue, book, etc. Then, personify these objects through their sound or smell. What type of personality do we associate with the tick-tock of a clock? How does it make us feel when the pencil sharpener grinds away? Now, how would we perceive these objects differently if we had never heard or smelled them? Then look at the five images listed above and explore them through this lens.

Activities for Younger Students

Surrounded by Animals

Look at images 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 21, 24, 27, 30. In this resource there are many images of animals both completely and partially depicted. Can you find and name them? Discuss their characteristics. What powers and/or ideas did they symbolize to the people of the ancient Near East? *Look at images 2, 3, 12, 14, 19, 20, 22.* Discuss the various identities and meanings of the supernatural combinations of humans and animals. Note the emphasis on horns, fangs, claws, and wings.

You might ask the students to do research on what ideas animals and human/animal combinations symbolize in other civilizations they have been studying.

Heads Up

Look at images 7 and 16. These works of art were designed to be worn on the head. *Now look at images 2, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20, 26, 28, 29, 30.* In these works of art people and divine beings wear a variety of headdresses, crowns, and head coverings. Describe what they are wearing on their heads and discuss the importance of headgear in communicating identity in the ancient Near East.

What is worn on the head is important in many other cultures including our own. Make a list of what people today wear on their heads (fireman's helmet, party hat, crown, baseball cap, beret, etc.) and what they might tell us about a person.

Ask each student to think about different types of headgear. What kind of hat would they like to wear to show their talents and abilities? Or ask them to imagine that they are a king or queen. What materials and symbols would they select? Ask the students to make a drawing or painting of themselves shown wearing their headgear of choice, or, using construction paper and glue or tape, create a hat that they can decorate with markers, stickers, or cut-out, colored paper.

Three Cups Full

Look at images 17, 25, and 27. Two are silver, one is gold. All three were hammered into shape. What are some other similarities and differences among them? At what kind of occasion would they have been used? What sort of person might have owned or used them? Talk about how the shape and decoration of each has a different meaning. How would you hold each to drink or pour from it?

As part of a drawing, painting, or sculpting activity to create their own cup, ask the students to consider which style of vessel they prefer. What animal would they like to select as part of their design? The students might start with the creature image first and then attach the funnel and lip of the cup, or vice versa.

Topics for Discussion for Older Students

Note to Teachers
While historians and archaeologists have learned a great deal about the ancient Near East since the nineteenth century, there is still much we do not know. Interpretations of artifacts and conventions change, and little is set in stone. This is an important concept for students to understand. While we can discuss the current understanding of ancient Near Eastern art, culture, and history, there is room for questions, speculation, critical thinking, and our own attempts to interpret and forge meaning.

Relevance: *Why study the ancient Near East?*
The ancient Near East was the birthplace of the world's first urban civilizations. With agricultural development, settlements thrived and specialization occurred. Cultural and technological advances proliferated, resulting in developments as fundamental and various as agriculture and writing systems, as well as foundational understandings in astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. Professions and class hierarchies were institutionalized, power was consolidated, trade networks were defined, and codes of law and diplomacy were conceived. Each of these developments contributes to our modern definition of civilization, and should any have developed differently, or not at all, our current world would look quite different.

Discuss with students the seminal cultural and technological innovations of the ancient Near East. Explore the role that each of these plays in our own society. How would it affect our lives should any be absent? For example, how would it affect our lives if writing had not been invented? How might we imagine that these innovations affected life in the ancient Near East? How does consideration of the impact of these aspects of society affect our understanding of the essential building blocks of civilization? In what myriad ways do cultural and technological developments affect society? What are the pros and cons of recent innovations? Do you imagine that people living in the ancient Near East had concerns about technological advances or changes in society, such as Hammurabi's legal code? Or might this be a uniquely modern perspective?

Once you have explored these questions with your students, widen the discussion to the question of relevance: why do we study the ancient Near East in the first place? How does knowing the origin of something help to understand its purpose, function, and legacy? How do certain aspects of civilization evolve? How do these changes affect civilization? What does "civilization" really mean? How do these questions help us to understand our own time? How does this understanding enable us to shape it?

Class Systems: *How did the building blocks of society develop?*
As societies of the ancient Near East became increasingly urban, specialization occurred. As communities worked together to meet the basic needs of survival, members were freed up to develop religious, artistic, and intellectual roles. Some became craftspeople, skillful technicians in clay, stone, or other media. Others became architects, scribes, or farmers. And still others assumed positions of authority, as priests or rulers. Individuals devoted themselves to these new professions as they were passed down from generation to generation. With these varied roles came the development of a social hierarchy, a class system defined by family and occupation. Rulers and priests held the positions of power, though prestige was afforded to the scribes and skilled artisans. What does it tell us about ancient Near Eastern culture that these were positions of power or honor? What professions carry similar

authority and prestige in society today? In the ancient Near East, a person filled the role to which he or she was born. In what ways is this similar to and different from societies today? What types of social hierarchies exist today? How are they defined?

In the ancient Near East, very few people were textually literate despite the fact that writing was invented in this area. Consequently, most people depended on trained scribes for textual guidance. Much was, therefore, communicated visually, in art and architecture. In art, details of dress, hairstyle, and activity were used to signify the rank and role of the person shown. What does this tell us about the importance of this information? What are some of the indicators of different social groups and classes today? How are they communicated, to whom, and in what contexts?

To deepen this conversation, explore the interplay of class and religion (as one aspect of society), both then and now. As the role of priests developed in ancient Near Eastern society, religion became increasingly organized, with attendant rites and rituals. Ancient Near Eastern priests participated in rituals at religious centers, while the average believer did not have direct access to these gods and goddesses. How might this have affected the priests' position in society, and the class hierarchy in general? Ancient Near Eastern mythology states that the gods created humans in order to provide for their needs. How was this relationship played out between the classes on earth? Who benefitted, and how? Are there any parallels in the cosmology of society today? What might our current cosmologies—implicitly and explicitly—sanction in society?

Trade: *How does trade affect cultural development?*
Mesopotamia, the heartland of the ancient Near East, was extremely fertile, an environmental factor that led to the thriving urban centers that developed there. But as agriculturally rich as it was, the region lacked in resources such as metal, precious stones, and wood—luxury goods desired by the powerful rulers who gained authority in the area. In order to gain access to these materials, therefore, rulers developed trading networks and, if possible, expanded their territory through conquest. Discuss with students the ways that international politics are influenced by the desire for goods and wealth, then and now. This has continued to be a primary impetus for conflict and expansion throughout history. Explore different examples with students, and then discuss the ramifications of these events. Do the ends ever mitigate or justify the original purpose?

Beyond politics, trade had an impact on a variety of cultural developments, perhaps most notably writing. The original impetus behind the development of a writing system was to record economic transactions regarding the local production of goods. Subsequently, writing became essential in the facilitation of long-distance trade. The adaptation of the writing system to reflect phonetic sounds was done so that the script could represent other languages, and thereby aid communication among different societies, a need often arising around trade. What other cultural developments can we trace back to trade? What is the relationship between something's initial purpose and its current use? What does it tell us about humankind that so many of our systems and innovations were born of trade? How does this understanding help us today? What modern developments—cultural and technological—are related to trade?

Empire: *What is an empire, and is the United States one?*
The ancient Near East encompassed an extremely wide geographical area and lengthy period of time. Within the millennia spanned, myriad groups rose to power, controlling extensive areas that were home to many different ethnic groups. These territorial states—some of them empires—were heterogeneous and home to a wide array of languages, resources, artistic styles, and belief systems. Over thousands of years, there was an ebb and flow of regional control, and as new powers ascended, they absorbed some of the practices and cultures of those that had come before, creating new societies from elements of the old. The Achaemenid Persians are a prime example of this phenomenon, as their

culture embraced a variety of religions and people, and their art reflected influences of Babylonia, Egypt, and Greece, among others.

Explore the concept of empire with your students. What does the word connote? Is it possible to have an empire without the conquest and absorption of neighboring cultures? Just as empires consistently rise, they inevitably fall. Why is that? What factors usually lead to the fall of the largest, most successful empires? Discuss the generalized collapse in the ancient Near East around 1200 B.C., and the subsequent period of great empires. What does this tell us about the nature of empires?

Using the conversation about empires in general, and the ancient Near Eastern empires in particular, ask your students whether or not they think the United States is an empire. Discuss the formation of our country, as well as the current practices of our government; are these trademarks of an empire? How is the United States similar to the empires of the ancient Near East? How is it different? How has and does the United States deal with its heterogeneity? How does its heterogeneity, and our responses to it, affect the United States' position in the world?

Patrimony: *Whose culture is it?*

The archaeological excavation of the ancient Near East began in the nineteenth century, and was conducted by Europeans. In the course of these excavations, many of the artifacts found were transported back to museums in the West to be researched and analyzed, and are still on display in these institutions today. While these institutions have performed a vital service in piecing together the history of these cultures, and continue to educate millions of visitors today, it has been argued that the artifacts do not belong outside of their country of discovery, and should be returned.

However, the civilizations of the ancient Near East were incredibly varied, occurring across a vast expanse of time and space. Many different cultures were represented, and artifacts from the period reflect this dynamic and interrelated history. Furthermore, ancient Near Eastern people recognized and reused each other's objects, ideas, and motifs. Statues were recycled for new purposes (image 10), styles were retooled, and innovations were improved upon. This continued throughout history and into the present, as concepts show up in other cultures and in other contexts. Also, monumental pieces, such as the steles of Hammurabi and Naram-Sin (FIGS. 7, 17), were occasionally appropriated by conquering armies who took them back to their capitals as signs of victory, where some stayed for millennia (see "The Royal Image," p. 38). Because of these various factors, naming a singular origin for many ancient Near Eastern artifacts is complicated.

With your students, discuss these different perspectives on the question of patrimony. If an artifact is found in a country, even if that country is no longer representative of the culture that created it, does it belong to that country more than it does to another? Is it important where an object was made and used? Is a nation's history the sole province of that nation? How are these questions affected by the increasing globalization of our world? Museums in major urban centers attract many more visitors, and therefore have the opportunity to educate many more people than those in remote places. How does this fact affect the question of patrimony? What is the purpose and meaning of a historical artifact? Can you think of ways in which countries and/or institutions could "share" artifacts?

Politics and Art: *How is art affected by politics?*

Throughout the history of the ancient Near East, shifts in artistic styles and motifs occurred in tandem with political changes. When the Akkadians rose to power, expanding their empire and increasing their access to exotic materials and diverse cultures, their art changed. The new style reflected a greater interest in natural forms and movement. And when their dynasty fell, the subsequent authorities commissioned work with a focus on piety and humility, thereby eschewing the Akkadians' failed ambition. The ever-changing landscape of ideals and imagery, as well as the continual reshuffling that resulted from various combinations of cultures brought together by conquest

or trade, are true hallmarks of ancient Near Eastern art; in some ways, the fact of change characterizes it more than any particular feature.

With your students, explore examples of the ways that art changed according to political events in the ancient Near East. Discuss the Akkadians, Assyrians, Achaemenids, the cities of Babylon and Palmyra, and the Seleucids. How did the art of these societies reflect the politics? What role did propaganda play? How might the population have been affected by the particular style of art? Then ask students to relate this idea to our culture. Use recent, seminal events to help students explore this, such as a presidential election or international conflict. Have students provide examples of ways that this event has been depicted in music, drama, and visual art. Beyond concrete depictions, what is the mood of the country because of this event? Is this the same or different than the mood of the government? How are these moods reflected in music, drama, and visual art? How do people react to these reflections in art? In what ways does this become a cyclical relationship?

The Power of the Image: *What can images "do"*?
Images of gods, rulers, spirits, demons, and assorted other creatures, beings, and symbols constantly surrounded the people of the ancient Near East. Imagine the visual impact of seeing these images everywhere, on a daily basis. And unlike most contemporary Western art, these representations were not meant to simply record images or ideas, but rather to be imbued with the actual essence and power of who or what they represented, and to therefore effect change—to make things happen in the world. While not all representations in the ancient Near East were considered to embody such power, those that were enlivened (see "Communicating with the Divine," p. 40) could represent a deity (image 18), a protective creature (images 20, 23), a ruler (image 10), or even a nonroyal person (images 5, 28). Ancient texts record that the care of some enlivened images included feeding and washing, and some cult statues were even taken on trips to other cities where they would visit other such deities. While our own ways of thinking about representation today may be rather different, there have been many parallels for uses of powerful, living images in different cultures throughout history to express religious, spiritual, cosmological, or political beliefs. Some examples drawn from current traditions include the feeding and care of sculptures of Hindu deities, and the processions of statues of saints during Catholic festivals such as the Feast of San Gennaro in New York City's Little Italy. What role do enlivened images play in your life today? How do you interact with these images, and what impact do they have on you?

Another way that we know that certain images created in the ancient Near East were considered fully alive and powerful is because they were often damaged or destroyed in order to remove their power. For example, the Old Testament describes at length the efforts taken by the early Jewish patriarchs to smash the "graven images" of gods worshiped by many people in the Levant during the Iron Age (see image 18). The deliberate destruction of power-laden images is called iconoclasm. Iconic images have continued to be destroyed since that time for a variety of reasons, including resistance to the political, social, or religious ideas they represent. Recent examples of iconoclasm include the toppling of statues of Communist leaders in Eastern Bloc countries after 1991 and statues of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, or the Taliban's demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001. How might the destruction of enlivened images in the ancient Near East compare to the destruction of these and other representations in modern times? Research such examples in the modern era. When modern iconic images are destroyed, what is the impact? How do we react today? What do we believe is happening? How is this similar to and different from the intentions and effects of iconoclasm in the ancient Near East?

Selected Resources

Basic References

Roaf, Michael. *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*. New York: Facts on File, 1990.

Sasson, Jack M., ed. *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. 4 vols. New York: Scribner, 1995.

Snell, Daniel C. *Life in the Ancient Near East, 3100–332 B.C.E.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997.

Van de Mieroop, Marc. *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 B.C.* 2nd ed. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007.

Walker, C. B. F. *Cuneiform*. Reading the Past 3. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Art and Architecture

Amiet, Pierre. *Art of the Ancient Near East*. New York: H. N. Abrams, 1980.

Collon, Dominique. *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East*. London: British Museum Publications, 1987.

Frankfort, Henri. *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*. Rev. ed. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996.

Oates, Joan. *Babylon*. London: Folio Society, 2005.

Oates, Joan, and David Oates. *Nimrud: An Assyrian Imperial City Revealed*. London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2001.

History, Literature, and Mythology

Black, Jeremy A., and Anthony Green. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.

Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

George, Andrew R., trans. *Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*. London: Penguin, 1999.

Archaeology

Meyers, Eric M. The *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Moorey, P. R. S. *Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries: The Archaeological Evidence*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999.

Rakic, Yelena, ed. With contributions by Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, Paul Collins, Jean M. Evans, Elisabetta V. Fino, and Sarah B. Graff. *Discovering the Art of the Ancient Near East: Archaeological Excavations Supported by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1931–2010. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (Summer 2010).

Exhibition Catalogues

Aruz, Joan, ed. *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus*. With Ronald Wallenfels. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003.

Aruz, Joan, Kim Benzel, and Jean M. Evans, eds. *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008.

Curtis, J. E., and J. E. Reade. *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995.

Harper, Prudence Oliver, Joan Aruz, and Françoise Tallon, eds. *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures from the Louvre*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992.

Harper, Prudence Oliver, Evelyn Klengel-Brandt, Joan Aruz, and Kim Benzel, eds. *Assyrian Origins: Discoveries at Ashur on the Tigris: Antiquities in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995.

Weiss, Harvey, ed. *Ebla to Damascus: Art and Archaeology of Ancient Syria*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 1985.

Zettler, Richard L., and Lee Horne, eds. *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1998.

Objects in the Collection

Ancient Near Eastern Art. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 41, no. 4 (Spring 1984).

Egypt and the Ancient Near East: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Introduction by Peter Dorman, Prudence Oliver Harper, and Holly Pittman. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987.

Crawford, Vaughn E., Prudence Oliver Harper, and Holly Pittman. *Assyrian Reliefs and Ivories in The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Palace Reliefs of Assurnasirpal II and Ivory Carvings from Nimrud*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980.

Hansen, Donald P. "A Proto-Elamite Silver Figurine in The Metropolitan Museum of Art." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal* 3 (1970), pp. 5–26.

Hansen, Donald P., and George. F. Dales. "The Temple of Inanna, Queen of Heaven, at Nippur." *Archaeology* 15 (1962), pp. 75–84.

Lilyquist, Christine. "The Dilbat Hoard," *The Metropolitan Museum Journal* 29 (1994), pp. 5–36.

Muscarella, Oscar White. *Bronze and Iron: Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988.

Russell, John Malcolm. *From Nineveh to New York: The Strange Story of the Assyrian Reliefs in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997.

For Students

Foster, Karen Polinger. *The City of Rainbows: A Tale from Ancient Sumer*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1999.

Kovacs, Maureen Gallery, trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Landau, Elaine. *The Babylonians*. Brookfield, Conn.: Millbrook Press, 1997.

Moss, Carol M. *Science in Ancient Mesopotamia*. Science of the Past. New York: Franklin Watts, 1998.

Schomp, Virginia. *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians*. New York: Franklin Watts, 2004.

Steele, Philip. *Eyewitness Mesopotamia*. London: DK Publications, 2007.

Zeman, Ludmila. *Gilgamesh the King (The Gilgamesh Trilogy)*. Plattsburgh, New York: Tundra Books, 1992.

_____. *The Revenge of Ishtar (The Gilgamesh Trilogy)*. Plattsburgh, New York: Tundra Books, 1993.

_____. *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh (The Gilgamesh Trilogy)*. Plattsburgh, New York: Tundra Books, 1995.

Selected Online Resources

Note: Please be aware that the content of websites may change without notice. It is also necessary to verify the identity of the supervising authority of the website; this information is usually available on the first page. We urge all teachers to preview Internet sites before assigning them to students. The sites suggested below were reviewed in June 2010.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art
www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/ancient_near_eastern_art

The Metropolitan Museum's *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*
www.metmuseum.org/toah

Starting from one of the following pages, you may find it helpful to explore the many thematic essays available on the *Timeline* about the ancient Near East:

West Asia: 8000–2000 B.C.
www.metmuseum.org/toah/world-regions/#/02/West-Asia

West Asia: 2000–1000 B.C.
www.metmuseum.org/toah/world-regions/#/03/West-Asia

West Asia: 1000 B.C.–1 A.D.
www.metmuseum.org/toah/world-regions/#/04/West-Asia

West Asia: 1–500 A.D.
www.metmuseum.org/toah/world-regions/#/05/West-Asia

Ancient Near Eastern Art: New Light on an Assyrian Palace
www.metmuseum.org/explore/anesite/html/el_ane_newfirst.htm

Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus
www.metmuseum.org/explore/First_Cities/firstcities_splash.htm

Marduk, King of the Gods: A Story of Ancient Mesopotamia
www.metmuseum.org/explore/marduk/index.html

Other Institutions

Ancient Mesopotamia: This History, Our History
mesopotamia.lib.uchicago.edu/

Three-dimensional Reconstruction of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud
(Select "Assyrian Palaces")
www.learningsites.com/Frame_layout01.htm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology
www.penn.museum/sites/iraq/

Glossary

Amarna Letters an archive of royal correspondence written in cuneiform on clay tablets discovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt. Dating to the fourteenth century B.C., these letters document the diplomatic relations between the rulers of Egypt and the various kingdoms of the Near East.

apotropaic designed to avert or turn away evil

bitumen (also known as tar or asphalt) a naturally occurring oily, black petroleum substance used as pigment, adhesive, and waterproofing; can be compounded with ground quartzite and molded; when hardened it can be carved

chasing the tooling of a metal surface from the front by denting or hammering without removing any actual metal (as opposed to engraving which does entail the removal of metal in the areas being worked). It is used to eliminate surface blemishes and to raise or accentuate patterns in relief. (Modified from *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*)

copper alloy a mixture of copper and another metal, which can occur naturally or be purposefully alloyed by man

cult statue image of a divinity that served in antiquity as a focal point for worship and cult rituals (Source: Grove Art Online). See also *idol*.

cuneiform composed of strokes in the form of a wedge; the system of writing in signs composed of strokes formed by the impression of a stylus in soft clay, or signs written in some other medium but with strokes in imitation of ones impressed on clay

filigree metalwork decoration in which fine precious metal wires, usually gold or silver, are delicately soldered in an openwork pattern. It is used especially in jewelry and the ornamentation of other small objects. (Source: Grove Art Online)

granulation a technique in which the craftsperson arranges small grains of metal in an ornamental or figurative pattern on a metal surface, with the granules held in place by joining them to the base without any evident trace of solder (Modified from Moorey 1994)

hieroglyphs a script, particularly that of the ancient Egyptians, in which many of the symbols are conventionalized, recognizable pictures of the things represented (Modified from dictionary.com)

iconography a term used in art history, referring to the study of the subject matter rather than the form of a work of art (Source: Grove Art Online/*Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*)

idol an image or other material object such as a stone, representing a deity to which religious worship is addressed (Source: dictionary.com). A cult statue is an example of an idol. See also *cult statue*.

intaglio a design in sculpture or carving that is cut below the surface of the material

lathe a machine for use in working wood, metal, etc., that holds the material and rotates it about a horizontal axis against a tool that shapes it (Source: dictionary.com)

lost-wax casting a method in which a sculpture is made in clay and coated with wax into which the details are worked. Several layers of clay are then applied over the wax to form an outer mold. The mold is then heated until the wax melts and runs out, leaving a space between the clay core and the outer mold into which molten bronze is poured. When the bronze cools and hardens, the outer mold is broken away.

pictograph a picture representing a word or idea (Source: dictionary.com)

repoussé relief decoration on metal, which is achieved by hammering and punching mainly from behind so the decoration projects (Source: *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*)

rhyton an ancient type of drinking vessel usually having a base in the form of the head of an animal, woman, or mythological creature, with a large opening through which the vessel was filled and a small spout from which liquid was dispensed

tang a long and slender projecting strip, tongue, or prong forming part of an object, such as a cast metal statue, and serving as a means of attachment for another part, such as a base (Modified from dictionary.com)

shaman a holy man or woman with spiritual and magical abilities

votive dedicated, consecrated, offered, erected, etc., in consequence of, or in fulfilment of, a vow (Source: *Oxford English Dictionary*)